



## AT HOME WITH THE CHELSEA PENSIONERS

*Inside the greatest retirement  
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(and it's open to Blesma Members!)*

**INSIDE:** Members' Weekend Supplement

## The biggest event in Blesma's year is back and at its best

**Inside:** Fun, friends and the future of the Association



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Photography: Andy Bate, Alister Thorpe

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The UK Invictus team meets the Prime Minister

## Blesma to feature heavily in fourth Invictus Games

**T**wenty one Blesma Members have been selected to compete for the UK team at this year's Invictus Games, which will be held in Sydney, Australia in October. More hopefuls than ever before – a whopping 451 people – applied to be a part of the UK squad, but only 72 wounded, injured and sick military personnel and veterans have been selected. The Games will see 500 competitors from 18 nations compete in 11 adaptive sports, with sailing set to be introduced for the first time.

Blesma Member Spencer Bull, who was only medically discharged from the Army last December, has been named vice captain

alongside former RAF Sergeant Michelle Turner. Spencer served as an officer with the Royal Green Jackets (now part of The Rifles) for 29 years, and will compete in shot put, hand bike, sailing and swimming.

“It was amazing to be selected for my first Invictus Games and then even more incredible to be selected as vice captain,” said the 50 year old, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2005. “I’ve just heard the news that my three children will be able to travel with my wife and I to Australia, so I cannot wait to see their faces when I tell them!”

“My children were the reason I applied to take part, as my chosen sports are ones

I can carry on doing with them once the Games have finished. My family are there for me at 2am when something isn't right and they support me through the highs and lows, so the Games are as much for them as they are for me.”

Spencer is hoping to work with his fellow vice captain, as well as the team's captain Mark ‘Dot’ Perkins to bring the UK competitors, coaches, families and friends closer together.

In June, Prince Harry, Patron of the Invictus Games Foundation, announced that the fifth Invictus Games will be hosted in The Hague, The Netherlands in May 2020.

## Pensioners on parade

Life at the Royal Hospital Chelsea (p36)



### THE GUYS WHO MADE THE GRADE

Twenty one Blesma Members will travel to Australia in October for the fourth Invictus Games. They are:

<b>Spencer Bull (vice captain)</b>	Athletics, cycling, sailing and swimming
<b>Andy Carlton</b>	Athletics and swimming
<b>Peter Dunning</b>	Athletics and wheelchair rugby
<b>Phillip Gillespie</b>	Archery and rowing
<b>Michael Goody</b>	Cycling and swimming
<b>Murray Hambro</b>	Athletics, rowing and swimming
<b>Wayne Harrod</b>	Cycling and sailing
<b>Ryan Hewitt</b>	Wheelchair basketball
<b>Kushal Limbu</b>	Athletics and wheelchair basketball
<b>Scott Mcneice</b>	Archery, athletics, cycling, sitting volleyball (reserve) and wheelchair rugby
<b>Michael Mellon</b>	Sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby
<b>Pa Modou Njie</b>	Rowing and sitting volleyball
<b>Mark Ormrod</b>	Athletics, rowing and swimming
<b>Richard Pullen</b>	Wheelchair basketball
<b>Netra Rana</b>	Sitting volleyball
<b>Daniel Richards</b>	Cycling
<b>James Rose</b>	Sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball
<b>Clive Smith</b>	Wheelchair rugby
<b>Michael Swain</b>	Cycling
<b>Aveuta Tuila</b>	Sitting volleyball
<b>Dave Watson</b>	Archery, athletics and rowing

# welcome

Summer is with us and we have just enjoyed beautiful weather at the Members' Weekend, which was very well attended. The event was combined with the Annual General Meeting and you can read about it in detail in this issue. The immediate feedback was that there was something fun and something poignant for everyone.

Member Alex Krol helped choreograph events at the Weekend and also recently organised a day of flying for Members in the North West. Both endeavours were much appreciated, and the flying can be read about in this issue. Not flying quite so high, but getting airborne nevertheless, are those Members training to participate in the festival performances of *This Is Not For You*, to commemorate the end of World War One. If you can, please get to one of the shows. The article in this issue will give you some flavour of what to expect.

Rather more traditional in style is the Royal Chelsea Hospital who are pleased we have produced a piece in this issue describing what it is like to be a Pensioner; there is so much more than the famous scarlet coat. If you are interested in joining the Hospital, please do discuss the entry criteria with your Blesma Support Officer as they will require some further explanation. We are grateful to Lawrence Jablonski for his contribution to the Association and for talking to us about life at the Royal Hospital. The endeavour and fellowship on show represent so much of what Blesma stands for.

Finally, returning to the Members' Weekend, it was the perfect opportunity to launch *Caring and Coping: The Family Perspective on Living with Limb Loss*, a report commissioned by Blesma, authored by Anglia Ruskin University Veterans and Families Institute, and funded by Forces in Mind Trust. This report was made possible by Members, and we will use it to influence the practices of health and care providers, and indeed the work of our own Support and Outreach Officers.

I would like to end on the LIBOR grant funded Outreach pilot programme. All the Officers are now in place and will be catching up with the membership as I write. Those at the Members' Weekend were most enthusiastic and supportive of the idea, so we have got off to a good start. Have an enjoyable summer!

**Barry Le Gry**  
Chief Executive



The previous Games have all been big successes



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## NEWS BRIEFS

### MEMBER CLIVE BECOMES HONORARY TOWNSMAN OF MARKET DRAYTON

Blesma Member Clive Jones has been awarded the accolade of Honorary Townsman of Market Drayton for his unselfish and successful dedication to charity and the local community in which he lives. Clive was presented with the honour by the Town Mayor at a reception at the Town Hall in March.

Market Drayton, which is a small market town in north Shropshire, thrives on the contribution that is made to its community life by its citizens. The Town Council has the right to bestow the award of Honorary Townsman upon those whose accomplishments are considered to be outstanding and therefore worthy of this prestigious accolade.

In July 2016, Clive became a finalist in the Pride of Shropshire Awards in the Courage category and was also chosen as a finalist in the Soldiering On Awards in the Inspiration category. The following September, Clive became a finalist in the Fundraising category at the Pride of Britain Awards after raising more than £76,000 for charity. Congratulations Clive!



Credit: Freemasonry Today



## Fundraising total soars at hottest-ever marathon

BLESMA'S RUNNERS TOOK ON THE hottest-ever London Marathon in April to raise more than £20,000 for the Association.

With temperatures rising above 23°C, more than 40,000 runners completed the gruelling race, which was started by Her Majesty The Queen from the grounds of Windsor Castle.

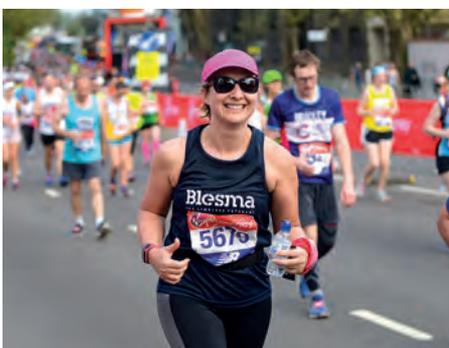
Blesma's nine brave runners all made it to the finish line, with Ed Allsop leading them in with an impressive time of 3 hours, 24 minutes and 41 seconds.

Former Royal Engineer Matty Bale, 28, from Cornwall, ran for Blesma to thank the Association for the support given to his

friend and former colleague James Wilson, after he lost both his legs in Afghanistan.

"It was an amazing day from start to finish, with crowds on every inch of the route shouting and cheering us on," Matty said. "When I felt a little tired someone would shout; 'Go on Matty, lad,' and then the next few people would shout the same. It was an amazing experience, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat!"

Blesma Member David Chandler, 36, from Northampton, who lost his right eye while serving in Afghanistan, also took part, completing the course in 4 hours, 26 minutes and 58 seconds.



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

## TELL US WHAT YOU WANT FROM YOUR MAGAZINE

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

# High five for Blesma Week as it proves a success once more



No challenge was too tough in early June as Members, supporters and volunteers all went the extra mile (or 100!) to support the fifth Blesma Week. From London to the Vale of York, the Association's annual week of fundraising and awareness raising sparked a range of events from running and cycling, to cake baking and soul dancing.

The week, which this year ran from 28 May to 03 June, saw more than 138 cyclists collectively clock up 13,800 miles, while The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research sold 100 cupcakes as part of the 100for100 Challenge. "The week has been even more meaningful this year because of the commemoration of World War One ending," said Blesma's Chief Executive, Barry Le Gry. "Besides raising funds for charitable work, Blesma Week has brought the Association and supporters together."

Here's a rundown of just some of the activities that took place during this year's Blesma Week, all of which will help reach the target of £60,000. A big thank you to everyone for your brilliant support.

## CYCLE 100

Blesma Member and Ambassador Jonathan Bell rallied cyclists to take part in the Blesma 100 once again this year. More than 130 riders launched Blesma Week by cycling an arduous-yet-scenic 100 miles through the Vale of York.

So far, the challenge has raised more than £10,000 for Blesma, but this was not the only 100-mile cycle event to take place

during the week. On Saturday 02 June, Members Nerys Pearce, David Sandles and Luke Delahunty joined fellow cyclists in Doncaster to take on the Sportive HQ Flat N Fast 100.

"It was a challenging ride, and it was pretty wet weather to start with, too," said Luke. "Nerys did amazingly well as seen as the furthest she had ever cycled before this was 45 miles!"



**Clockwise from top: Blesma's cyclists, the Northern Hub, and Outreach Officer Rupert Lucas all doing their bit**

## 100FOR100 CHALLENGE

As part of Blesma Week, the Association launched the 100for100 Challenge to mark the centenary of the end of WWI. The task was to complete 100 of any given challenge, whether that was miles running, cakes sold or minutes of silence.

Blesma staff didn't miss out on the action as staff members across the country joined together to help launch the challenge. Through the week, 22 staff members covered a total of 243 miles, smashing the original 100 mile target!

Meanwhile, in Newcastle, The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research successfully sold 100 cupcakes in just two hours at Northumbria University, raising more than £100.

Jennifer Hawes, who is the wife of Blesma Member Chris, also took on a 100for100 baking challenge and attempted to sell 100 cookies and cakes at her workplace





at MOD St Athan. Jen raised £115 for Blesma and sold 300 treats in the process! *The 100for100 Challenge is running for the rest of the year. Visit [www.blesma.org/100for100](http://www.blesma.org/100for100) for more information*

### TFL COLLECTIONS

Thanks to the incredible support of Transport for London, Blesma had a large presence at Canary Wharf and Kings Cross tube stations, with a collection at each station during Blesma Week. A troop of 50 volunteers kindly gave up their time to shake their buckets and raise £8,613.75.

### BIG BBK BAKE OFF

As well as being a Blesma Week Silver sponsor and lending a hand with the TfL bucket collections, staff from Bolt Burdon Kemp organised a *Bake Off* challenge and brought along their own Paul and Prue to judge the best bake.

“The team organised the Big BBK Bake Off and bake sale to raise funds, and our very own Paul and Prue deliberated on the winner and runner-up. Then the cakes went on sale to the rest of the firm, raising more than £80,” said Claire Withey, senior



**Clockwise from top: Cycle 100, the Big BBK Bake Off judges, BSO Tom Hall, and Chadwell Heath staff ‘do Blesma Week’**

solicitor at BBK. “Members of the military team also took part in bucket collections at Kings Cross tube station to tempt happy commuters to part with their spare change!”

### BURPEES FOR BLESMA

Sailors on board HMS Dragon took part in a ‘Burpees for Blesma’ challenge, organised by leading physical trainer James Johnson. For £1, anyone on board could buy a ticket of 10 burpees and nominate someone to complete them. The challenge proved popular, raising almost £250.

### HOLLIE’S CROSSFIT HERO WORKOUT CHALLENGE

On Saturday 02 June, Hollie Shirley, the granddaughter of a WWII double amputee who served as part of the crew of a

Lancaster Bomber, completed an epic CrossFit Hero workout of the day challenge. Hollie completed the ‘Murph’ workout, which was created by US Navy Lieutenant Michael Murphy, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2005. The workout is made up of a one-mile run, 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, and 300 squats, before finishing with another one-mile run.



### RUBY HINES’ WALK WITH ANDY GRANT

Warminster School student Ruby Hines rounded off Blesma Week with a 20km sponsored walk along Basingstoke Canal with Blesma Member Andy Grant.

The 13 year old chose to fundraise for Blesma as part of her Foundation Project Qualification, which encourages students to complete a project on one of their interests. “My mum is a mental health nurse in the Army and has connections with Blesma Members,” Ruby said. “She looked after Andy when he was first injured and they kept in contact, so I invited him to walk with me. On the day we decided to turn our 10km walk into 20km. It took about four hours, but it was a great day.” Ruby raised £1,055 for Blesma, smashing her £500 target in just a week!

### SOUL NIGHT

The East Lincs Soul Club held a Soul Night at Blackburn Golf Club, and raised £175. The club is raising funds all year and has raised almost £500 so far.

## Thank you to our Silver sponsors

*Bolt Burdon Kemp, GardaWorld, Marbank Construction, Military Mutual and Blackstone Consultancy.*





## Photographers were racing amateurs – but not furlong!

**B**lesma's photographers were given the rare opportunity to showcase their work to the public in March. The exhibition, which was shown during the Grand Military Day at Sandown Park racecourse, was organised by the Jockey Club following two photography events they held for Members in 2017.

"We were delighted to work with Blesma to bring this project to life. The participants attended two race days in September and were given some photography tips from our racecourse photographer before they spent the afternoon capturing their own images," said Phil White, Regional Director of Jockey Club Racecourses, London Region. "It was brilliant to welcome the group back on our Grand Military Day in March to display their photographs and tell race goers all about the project, as well as about the great work that Blesma does."

The eight Members who attended the Grand Military Day were each given the chance to display their three favourite photographs in the exhibition.

"It was a pleasure to work alongside Steve McNeice and the Jockey Club to organise the three Sandown Park Photography events for our Blesma photographers," said Blesma's Sue Wright. "Every Member who attended gained a tremendous insight into how to take fantastic equine photography.

I particularly enjoyed the talk that was given to our group by racing photographer Dan Abraham. His tips and techniques made me focus on what to look for when shooting a race and I spent the whole time at the finishing line trying to capture horses with all four hooves off the floor!"

### GUY DISNEY HAS ANOTHER FAIRYTALE FINISH

Former Army Captain Guy Disney has made history by becoming the first amputee jockey to race over the Grand National fences at Aintree. Guy rode his horse Gallery Exhibition over the fences in the Foxhunters' Chase race in April, finishing in 12th place despite being thrown off his horse when it reared up in the parade ring.

The 35 year old races with a lower right leg prosthetic after he was injured when the vehicle he was travelling in was hit by a grenade in Afghanistan in 2009.

Last year, Guy (pictured right) became the first amputee jockey to win at a professional racecourse in Britain, when he rode Rathlin Rose to victory in the Royal Artillery Gold Cup at Sandown Park.



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

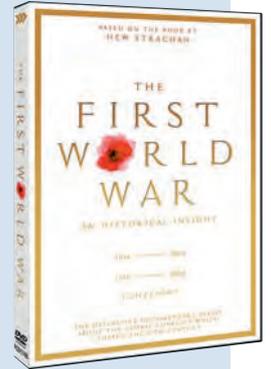


## NEWS BRIEFS

### WIN A WORLD WAR ONE DVD WITH OUR READER GIVEAWAY

A new World War I documentary series was released in June and Blesma is offering five lucky readers the chance to win a free copy of the DVD.

*The First World War* is a six-part series that is based on the book by Hew Strachan, and includes new interpretations of, and insights into, the momentous events during the Great War. **For your chance to win one of the five DVDs, email [ihj@blesma.org](mailto:ihj@blesma.org) or call 020 8548 2514. The DVDs will be given away on a first-come, first-served basis.**



# Apply now to have your Will written for free

**B**lesma has teamed up with The National Free Wills Network to give Members and supporters access to a free Will writing service. The new partnership will allow individuals and couples who are part of the Blesma family, as well as supporters of the Association, to have their Will(s) written or amended free of charge, using qualified local solicitors.

Your Will is an important way of making sure that the people and causes you care about are looked after once you are gone. There is no pressure to remember Blesma in your Will but, if you choose to leave Blesma a gift, it is a great way to be a part of the Association's future and support veterans without spending a penny today.

The free service applies to the writing of Simple Wills, (those that do not deal with complex issues). The offer also includes 'Mirror Wills' for couples.

*Please see the leaflet included in this issue for further details or to apply for the service. To speak to someone about the scheme, please contact Barbara Warner on 020 8548 3517 or email [glacities@blesma.org](mailto:glacities@blesma.org)*

### ROYAL MARINE GETS GOLD IN GOLD COAST GAMES

Former Royal Marine Joe Townsend won gold for England in the para-triathlon at the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Joe, who lost both his legs in an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2008, claimed his first para-triathlon gold in a major event at the Games, which were held in the Gold Coast, Australia in April.

Joe's para-triathlon journey began back in 2011 when he competed in his first Ironman competition. He got the taste for international events in 2012 when he carried the Paralympic torch into the London 2012 stadium. Joe went on to claim four gold medals at the 2014 Invictus Games before competing in the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio.

## MUDDY MEMBER MICHAEL TACKLES NUCLEAR RACES

Blesma Member Michael Lewis (centre, lying down) was joined by 25 fellow mud lovers in May to complete the 7K Blesma Wave at the ever-popular Nuclear Races.

"I wanted to give back to Blesma for all the help and support I have received from the Association since being injured in Afghanistan," said the former Paratrooper. "The race was very challenging but very rewarding. I completed all the obstacles and even gave able-bodied participants a run for their money!"

Michael, who lost his right leg and some of the use in his left arm while serving in Afghanistan, led the competitors through the sludgy obstacle race to raise more than £700 for the Association.



## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# Maintaining prosthetic limbs

## The mechanical solution to a biological problem

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. This issue; prosthetic limbs and the importance of proper servicing and maintenance



Those of you who regularly use a prosthetic limb will be all too aware that adjustments are needed from time to time to maintain the correct function. This could be anything from a simple tightening of a screw to prevent movement of a component to a full service of the limb to check more complicated parts.

Your prosthetist will be able to advise you of the basic routine checks that you will be able to carry out, such as examining the foot shell for wear and tear, or listening for creaking noises in a mechanical joint. Care of your prosthesis is just as important as caring for your stump [*this subject was covered in the Spring 2018 issue*] as failure of any of the mechanical parts that make up a prosthetic limb could lead to injury or extended periods during which the limb cannot be worn.

Regular and routine maintenance should therefore become part of your prosthetic journey. Daily checks for wear and tear should become a habit and, as you get to know your prosthesis, you will be better placed to let your prosthetist know when something is not quite right. The limit of your personal intervention should be the addition or reduction of socks to maintain socket fit. All limb centres will make arrangements for urgent or emergency repairs to be carried out by a qualified person. You should never attempt to 'do it yourself'; regardless of how technically minded you might be.

DIY modification of any part of a prosthesis can be very dangerous, and limbs provided by the MoD or NHS remain the property of the providing service. Some limbs are supplied with a device that allows the wearer to interchange components below the socket. Such devices are designed to be safe and maintain the correct alignment to prevent injury or long-term damage, and the user will be shown how to use such a device safely by their prosthetist. If you have such a device fitted you will know.

Some components, such as microprocessor controlled knees and ankles or multi-function hands will require regular servicing. These high value and complicated components are often sent away to the manufacturer in accordance with a servicing schedule. Failure to do so may invalidate any warranty, which in turn can lead to expensive repair or replacement bills. Therefore, it is vital that if you are invited to attend your limb centre



Photograph: Andy Bate

for your prosthesis to be checked or serviced you do so. Life can get in the way sometimes so dialogue between you and the limb centre should include notification of when checks or servicing of parts is due so suitable appointments can be booked in. Where limbs are to be sent away a replacement unit will be provided on loan.

It is also important that as a prosthetic user you adhere to the usage guidelines for your particular device. If you are in any doubt about what you should or should not do, please discuss this with your prosthetist. The prosthetic limb or limbs that you have will have been prescribed to enable you, where practicable, to achieve your goals and carry out aspects of daily living. If you feel that your prosthesis is not meeting your needs, discuss this with your prosthetist. Your BSO or BSO (Prosthetics) can assist you if required.

*For more on any prosthetics issues, please contact BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org), or visit [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*

“  
**TAKING CARE OF YOUR PROSTHESIS IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS CARING FOR YOUR STUMP, AS A FAILURE OF MECHANICAL PARTS COULD LEAD TO INJURY**  
 ”



Hampton's Mike Hollis and his hog

## Military Harley hogs the limelight to raise money

A SERVING SOLDIER'S DAD IS USING his military-themed Harley Davidson to raise money for Blesma.

Mike Hollis, from Hampton, bought his Harley-Davidson in 2012 and decided on the military design in honour of his son, Simon, who serves in the Army Air Corps. The bike's artwork features poppies, a Lynx helicopter, and a dog handler and his dog, as well as camouflage and patches.

"I wouldn't be able to run a marathon or climb a mountain, but I'm always attending memorial rides so I thought I could ride my bike to raise awareness for Blesma," said

Mike. "A few of Simon's friends have been helped by Blesma after they lost limbs, so I already knew of all the good work the Association does."

Mike has so far raised more than £15,000 from attending memorial events in the UK and Europe with his bike, Blesma banner and bucket. He even travelled to Normandy for the 70th anniversary of D-Day.

"I have three goals; the first is to get Prince Harry on the bike, the second is to raise £30,000 for Blesma, and the third is to get my story into *Blesma Magazine*," said Mike. Well, one out of three isn't bad!

### NEWS BRIEFS



#### MATT WESTON HAMMERS HOME MESSAGE OF HELP

West Ham United FC's players and supporters joined forces at the London Stadium towards the end of last season to cheer on Blesma. At half-time during the club's Premier League match against Southampton, Blesma Member Matt Weston was given the chance to go onto the pitch and tell the 56,887 fans all about the support Blesma has given him. As a result, donations from generous fans during the match raised more than £1,000.



#### HELICOPTER EVENT LEAVES BLESMA ON CLOUD NINE

The Helicopter Museum's World at War weekend attracted a record number of visitors in April. The Weston-super-Mare event, which this year raised money for Blesma, included live re-enactment groups, aircraft displays and fascinating collections of WWII military gear. Blesma Members including bobsleigh athlete Corie Mapp and motorcycle racer Chris Ganley were special guests alongside the last surviving Dambuster, George Johnson.

"The weekend was a huge success and we'd love to thank all the Members who attended for everything they did over the weekend, and we'd like to thank Blesma as an organisation for all its support. It was fantastic to work together!" said Peter Michallat, the museum's Marketing Assistant.

## SAINTS WELCOME BLESMA'S BUCKETS

Northampton Saints Rugby Club welcomed the Association to their stadium for a match in April after being inspired by a talk from Blesma Member Simon Harmer.

In March 2017, Simon gave a talk to the rugby club on behalf of the Association, which resulted in Blesma being the club's chosen charity for its match against Saracens earlier this year.

Prior to the game, Saint's prop Jamal Ford-Robinson (far right) even grabbed a bucket to help with the collections that raised more than £1,000 for the Association.



## NEWS ANALYSIS

# “We are told what to expect but not how to cope”

After an 18-month study into how limb loss affects not just military amputees, but their families too, the findings of the Blesma Families Project have been released



**HILARY  
ENGWARD**  
Senior research fellow  
*Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research*

Pioneering research has revealed that a radical new approach is needed to get the best for veterans and their families who are trying to cope with the wide-ranging impacts of limb loss. Findings from the Blesma Families Project, which were presented at the annual Members' Weekend in June (see supplement for separate story), have identified the need for significant changes in the way support is given to both Members and their family carers.

“The health and wellbeing of the carer is crucial to the health and wellbeing of the veteran with limb loss, but too little attention has been paid to their needs until now,” says Hilary Engward, senior research fellow at Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research, which conducted the 18-month-long project.

The study interviewed and surveyed 72 people – Blesma Members and their families – to get a unique insight into how families live with limb loss.

“We wanted to increase the understanding of how people care in a family unit, particularly by looking at the people who are actually doing the caring,” adds Hilary. The findings have been published in a report entitled *Caring and Coping: The Family Perspective on Living with Limb Loss*, and will feed into Blesma's working practices for BSOs. A Living With Limb Loss Support Model will also enable both civilian and military services to provide better support to families dealing with limb loss. *Blesma Magazine* sat down with Hilary to pinpoint some of the key findings...

### THE NATURE OF CURRENT CARE SYSTEMS

“The physical demands of caring for someone are important to understand, but the vast range of tasks that are involved on a daily basis are not recognised,” says Hilary. “It is often the little things that make a huge difference to a veteran's experience. In the research interviews, people referred to them as ‘the little things that we had to find out for ourselves’. That could

mean making a cup of tea in the kitchen and not being able to carry it back into the lounge, finding that your socks are out of reach, or wanting to contribute to household chores but not being able to reach the tea towel or dishcloth to help.”

In and of themselves, these are small things but, says Hilary, they create frustration for the veteran and, as a result, for the carer. “Families don't feel they can talk about this type of issue because it seems mundane, so the ability to adapt to a new way of living is crucial, especially in the early stages when the veteran returns home from professional care. Unfortunately, people often only find this out as they go along.”

Hilary believes structured advice and guidance early on about these small things could make the process easier to cope with for veterans and their families. “It would be simple advice but it all adds up,” says Hilary. “Being able to help with the washing up helps bring back life pre-limb loss, for example, and socks can be left within reach, so finding them isn't troublesome.”

### THE NEED FOR HONESTY

The research found that respondents wanted greater honesty and straight talking about the impact of limb loss and the different ways of coping with it. “They wanted to be allowed to feel angry, frustrated and upset at times,” says Hilary. “Family carers often feel they can't say anything. They may even feel anger towards a partner because of the limb loss but cannot express it because that would be seen as being nasty. Yet these emotions are natural when faced with a sudden, devastating change, and they should be discussed.”

### DON'T IGNORE THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

“Family carers say things like; ‘I should be strong as they are the ones who have had the trauma’. However, the reality is that we are human and we need space to say we are angry,” says Hilary. “One of the things that came from the research is that no-one asks families



The study set out to understand how people care in a family unit



how they manage that aspect of limb loss because the focus is on the physical and medicalised aspects. They are told what to expect in relation to coping with the physical aspects of limb loss but are told very little when it comes to the emotional aspects.”

### PAIN AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

Many of the participants spoke about having Phantom Limb Pain but not admitting to the extent of the pain or asking for help. This impacts on the caring family who feel helpless because they see the individual in pain but feel as though they can't do anything to help.

“Families told us that Phantom Limb Pain is not widely understood and is often treated in a trial-and-error approach by health professionals,” says Hilary. “As a result of this feedback, Blesma is developing information about pain and pain management, and because pain and how to deal with it were two of the big features that came out of our research, we are planning a new project to find out how veterans understand, and deal with, pain.”

### THE CARER'S HEALTH IS VITAL

When it comes to staying healthy, the main focus is perhaps obviously on the veteran. However, the carer could also be suffering from health conditions but might be so busy caring for their loved one that they neglect to look after themselves.

“Participants told our researchers that the military way of not admitting to needing support is family wide,” says Hilary. “Their attitude is; ‘We are from a military family, so we get on with it’. However, if the main carer's health worsens, it will have a pronounced

“  
**PEOPLE WANT MORE HONESTY AND STRAIGHT TALKING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF LIMB LOSS AND THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF COPING WITH IT**  
”

impact on the veteran's wellbeing. No-one is taking the carer aside and asking how they are doing or making sure they get to their own doctor's appointments and check-ups. We need to improve this aspect of care as its impact can be very serious for everyone involved.”

There is an overwhelming need to realise that both the person with the limb loss and their carer will cope differently. “We often assume that, if the veteran is doing well then so is the carer, but it is not always that straightforward,” says Hilary. “Everyone focuses on the veteran's health and wellbeing while their main family carer may be thinking; ‘How will I manage? Can I do this?’ There is often a different reality and set of unknowns back home that go unnoticed.”

### REALISTIC GOAL SETTING

Not every amputee is young, fit and able to take part in action-packed activities. Many people need more sedate goals to aspire to, and even though these smaller goals are important, they are often not recognised or planned for. The goals could be to return to activities that were part of everyday life pre-limb loss, such as gardening, painting or fishing – for both the veteran AND their main family carer. A poignant example from the research was one veteran's goal to walk along the beach holding hands with his wife.

“These goals need to be realistic in relation to one's health, so it is about working out how to do those things for both the carer and the veteran,” says Hilary.

*You can read the research study in full, and discover the findings and recommendations of the Blesma Families Project, at [www.blesma.org/familiesproject](http://www.blesma.org/familiesproject)*

## Activities 2018

# Get out and active in 2018

Blesma is offering Members the chance to try more activities than ever before in 2018 – all for free! Here's what's coming up in the next few months. Don't miss out! Apply now by emailing Emily Mizon on [meo@blesma.org](mailto:meo@blesma.org) or by calling her on 020 8548 7094



To apply for a place email [meo@blesma.org](mailto:meo@blesma.org) or call 020 8548 7094

### Scuba Diving Expedition

**Location:** Hurgada, Egypt

**Date:** 13-21 October

**Application deadline:** 06 August

A great chance to enjoy some of the world's best scuba diving in warm water. You can dive for fun or work towards diving qualifications. If you've never dived before, or need some refresher training, qualified instructors will teach you everything you need to know at a weekend training session in the UK prior to the expedition. Complete novices are welcome, however, you will have to undertake the mandatory training.

#### Who can take part?

Anyone who can move up and down stairs on a 60ft dive boat with minimal assistance. First-time divers must attend a try dive before selection. Post selection, Members will need to take part in the mandatory training.

course that has been designed to teach you all about life on a ranch and riding on the trails. Warning: be prepared that you might not want to come home!

#### Who can take part?

This activity is suitable for most people but please be aware that you must have upper body movement and be able to hold yourself up, sitting on a horse, for prolonged periods

of time. You must also be able to legally enter the United States.

### Fitness and Lifestyle Course

**Location:** Fuerteventura

**Date:** 11-16 November

**Application deadline:** 12 August

The aim of this course is to give Members the chance to look at their fitness levels

## Activities Calendar 2018

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	APPLY BY
13-21 October	Scuba Diving Expedition	Egypt	06 August
10-11 November	Remembrance Weekend	London	10 August
10-18 November	Horseback in America	Arizona	22 July
11-16 November	Fitness and Lifestyle Course	Fuerteventura	12 August
30 Nov - 03 Dec (TBC)	Christmas Markets Couples' Weekend	Belgium	01 September
01-11 December	Colorado Ski Spectacular	Colorado, USA	20 August
19-27 Jan 2019	Winter Sports Europe	France	09 November

### Remembrance Weekend

**Location:** London

**Date:** 10-11 November

**Application deadline:** 10 August

This is the annual Blesma Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph which takes place over Remembrance Weekend. It is always one of the most poignant events in the entire Blesma Calendar.

#### Who can take part?

Any Member.

### Horseback in America

**Location:** Arizona, USA

**Date:** 10-18 November

**Application deadline:** 22 July

A week's worth of horsemanship and general cowboy-ing it up! Spend a week in the beautiful Arizona Desert on a



and current lifestyle choices. The course will consist of intensive physical training sessions combined with expert advice on training and diet from fitness experts.

**Who can take part?**

Any Member who is looking for a change in their lifestyle.

### Belgium Christmas Markets Couples' Weekend

**Location:** Brussels and Bruges

**Date:** 30 November - 03 December (TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 September  
Fancy a weekend break to get into the Christmas spirit? This is a chance to enjoy the historic cities of Belgium and their world-famous Christmas markets. Enjoy the festivities and relax with your partner.

**Who can take part?**

Anyone, but please be aware that the markets get busy and crowded, and that the streets are cobbled in some places.

### Colorado Ski Spectacular

**Location:** Colorado, USA

**Date:** 01-11 December

**Application deadline:** 20 August  
This annual event, run by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectaculars for adaptive winter sports. The perfect week to have fun on the slopes, socialise, and enjoy all that the ski spectacular has to offer.

**Who can take part?**

Most injury types can be catered for but you must be able to legally enter the USA.



Clockwise: Andy Allen, Steve Crowley and Luke Delahunty win at the Soldiering On Awards



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

# Blesma's hat trick at Soldiering On Awards

Three Blesma Members have been honoured at the 2018 Soldiering On Awards for their outstanding achievements. Triathlon athlete Steve Crowley took home the award for Sporting Excellence, Andy Allen won the Inspiration award and Luke Delahunty faced the public vote to win the People's Choice award.

"It was the first awards evening I've ever attended and it was an honour to be nominated let alone win," said Steve Crowley. "I didn't think I would win but it means other people are noticing me!"

Former Royal Irish Regiment soldier Andy Allen, who lost both his legs along with his sight in an IED explosion in Afghanistan, was nominated for how he has turned his life around post injury. Not only has Andy become a member of Northern Ireland's parliament but he has also set up his own charity, AA Veterans Support, to help veterans and their families in Northern Ireland.

"After I was injured, I could have dealt badly with the hand I had been given, but I picked myself up and carried on," Andy said. "I kept myself busy during my recovery and now I feel rewarded when helping other people.

"This award doesn't just recognise my achievements, it's for everyone who has helped me since the day I was injured in Afghanistan. It's also recognition for everyone who works so hard behind the scenes at AA Veterans Support."

Luke Delahunty was also nominated for the way in which he has overcome adversity as well as for his hard work with charities, particularly inspiring young people who find themselves in a similar situation to him.

"It was surreal to win, especially because it was by a public vote – the fact that people voted for me makes it even more special," he said of his award.

Congratulations to the three winners, and to everyone who was nominated for this year's Soldiering On Awards.

# OBITUARIES

## Those we have lost

### Winston Bilcock

09 September 1940 – 19 March 2018

WINSTON 'WINK' BILCOCK HAS DIED, aged 77. Wink was born in Huntingdon in 1940. He joined the Royal Navy in 1957 serving on HMS Blackwood, HMS Plymouth and HMS Whitby. This last ship took him to the Far East at the time of President Sukarno, which was where Wink won his medals.

Wink married June in 1962 and went on to father two sons and a daughter. After serving in the Navy, Wink worked with the Economic Forestry Group, an arm of the Forestry Commission. In 1971 he was asked if he would like to open an ATS depot in Crediton. He did, staying at the Mill Street premises for more than 23 years, entering a good float in Crediton Carnival every October.

In 1992, Wink was involved in an accident that resulted in him losing part of a leg, but he got back to walking and continued to garden, which he loved to do. He was proud to have attended the Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph in London for several years and the collection at his funeral service was in aid of Blesma. He will be sadly missed.



Winston with his wife, June, at Members' Weekend 2016

Words: Courtesy of Crediton Courier

### Those who have passed away

March - May 2018. May they rest in peace.

Adams W	UDR	HQ	01/03/2018
Bartrum B	RAF	HQ	March 2018
Beck L	Wiltshire	HQ (E. Berks)	04/03/2018
Bilcock W	RN	HQ	19/03/2018
Bruce D	RRF	HQ	26/05/2018
Bryan G	RE	HQ (E.Berks)	21/03/2018
Clark G	Royal Warwickshire	HQ	20/03/2018
Fisher W	RAF	HQ	20/03/2018
Foster L	RAPC	HQ	10/03/2018
Gaston J	UDR	HQ	15/03/2018
Harris J	Coldstream Guards	Bournemouth	09/04/2018
Haw K	REME	HQ	30/04/2018
Ingram R	RAF	HQ (E.Berks)	08/05/2018
Klimek R	Carpathian Brigade	HQ	02/03/2018
Long G	RAF	HQ (Bradford)	07/04/2018
Mackenzie D	Southern Rhodesia Armoured Car Regiment	HQ	14/03/2018
Reid G	RA	HQ	March 2018
Revert M	RN	Isle of Wight	07/04/2018
Rook P	RAF	HQ	09/03/2018
Sporton A	RASC	Nottingham	28/05/2018
Staig D	REME	HQ (E.Berks)	10/04/2018
Willis D	Royal Signals	HQ	30/03/2018

## Captain Gerald Bryan

02 April 1921 – 21 March 2018

CAPTAIN GERALD JACKSON BRYAN, CMG, CVO, OBE, MC, soldier and government administrator, died in March aged 96. He was born in Belfast and had a feisty temperament even as a boy. During his education he developed a passion for rock climbing and anything adventurous. After the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, he hoped to get a regular commission in the Royal Engineers. War intervened, but he got his sapper commission in 1940 and volunteered for commando training.

Gerald sailed with Layforce towards the Mediterranean in January 1941. Layforce was used to land behind the French positions in Lebanon. Fierce opposition, particularly from the Foreign Legion, was encountered, and one Allied attack on French artillery positions near the Litani River proved costly.

Despite Gerald's party capturing a 75mm gun and turning it on the enemy, all the other officers in his company were killed and, after being shot through both legs, he was captured. His wounds necessitated the amputation of one leg below the knee. He and the other British wounded were released under an armistice agreed in July 1941. Gerald was awarded the Military Cross for his action on the Litani River and returned to England.



Captain Gerald Bryan during his time in the Royal Engineers

No longer fit for active service after losing his lower leg, he was assigned to the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which developed special personal weapons and sabotage explosives at Station IX in Welwyn.

As he recovered from the injuries to his remaining leg, he applied for a more active appointment and was eventually accepted to the Colonial Service. Before that, he was promoted to acting major and director of scientific research at SOE's headquarters in central London, until his transfer in 1944. His first appointment was to Swaziland,

where he met Wendy Hull, his future wife. They were married in 1947 and had three children: Caesar, Mary and Diana. His wife predeceased him, but his son and daughters survive him.

His tour in Swaziland ended in 1950 and he was posted to Barbados as financial secretary, tasked with securing the island's financial stability. This was a challenge for a 29 year old, but he achieved what was required and became assistant colonial secretary until he was transferred to Mauritius in 1954.

Appointed OBE for his service there, he became the Queen's representative with powers of governor in the British Virgin Islands.

In 1962, he became administrator of St Lucia and, in 1967, oversaw the island's independence. He was later appointed government secretary on the Isle of Man, but this was not a happy interlude. The absence of a suitable house made for awkward living. His wife also suffered problems with her sight, which meant they had to make frequent flights to London for treatment.

After two years he was reassigned as general manager of the new Londonderry Development Commission. In 1969, he brokered a truce between the Catholic community and the RUC for the restoration of water supplies to the Bogside. The next day he saw the arrival of the army to seal off the city centre.



## Arnold Pickup

25 July 1931 – 14 May 2018

BLESMA SUPPORTER ARNOLD PICKUP HAS PASSED AWAY at the age of 86. Arnold spent more than 25 years tirelessly raising money for Blesma and other causes close to his heart by completing 434 running races, including more than 50 marathons, 112 half marathons and countless 5k and 10k runs.

Arnold only started to run long distances when he turned 53 years of age, and is reported to have raised more than £20,000 for his chosen causes. Rather impressively, he ran his final race, the York 10k, in 2014, at the age of 83!

The fundraising veteran, who served in the Merchant Navy from 1948 to 1953, also worked as a Blesma Welfare Officer in Huddersfield and was heavily involved in the Huddersfield Branch from 1994 until its closure in October 2006. After the Branch closed, he still supported Members in the area, arranging an informal monthly lunch for anyone who wanted to attend.

To mark his dedication to the Association, Arnold became an Honorary Blesma Member and remained active within the Association to such an extent that, in 2010, he won the Service to Charity award at the *Huddersfield Examiner Awards*.

Arnold passed away on Monday 14 May after a long illness. His funeral was held on 07 June 2018.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Is affordable arm a game changer?

A young company, Open Bionics, has launched a state-of-the-art 3D-printed bionic arm that does what some established prosthetics can, but at a fraction of the price



**T**he most affordable multi-grip bionic arm ever built has just hit the market, promising many upper limb amputees the chance to get one of these life-changing devices for the first time.

Developed by British startup company Open Bionics, the Hero Arm sets out to replicate the movement of a human hand – but what really sets it apart is the fact that it is 3D printed, which has massively brought down the cost of manufacture, and therefore the price.

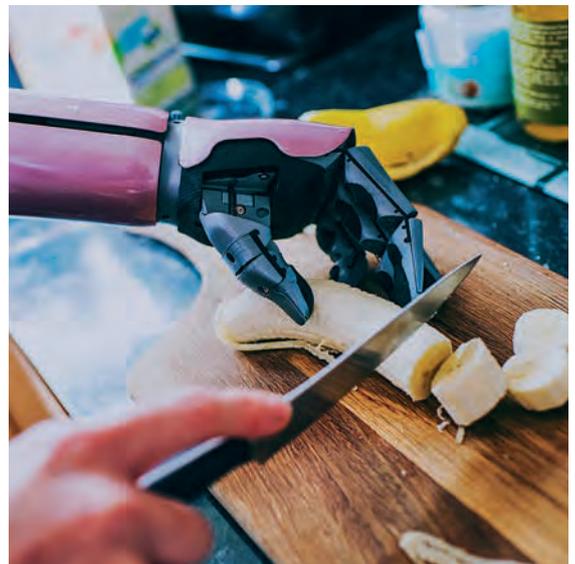
“In the past, these arms have cost between £30,000 and £60,000, and I’ve spoken to people in America who have spent more than \$120,000 on one,” explains Samantha Payne who is co-founding partner of Open Bionics with Joel Gibbard (both pictured above left). “Ours will vary in price according to which clinic you go through, but will cost about £10,000 – way below what was previously being offered on the market.”

The possibility of the Hero Arm being available on the NHS is tantalisingly close, too. Open Bionics has an NHS product development contract, and will initially offer the Hero Arm to children aged between eight and 17. However, the price point means there could soon be hope for adult amputees. “This type of arm already exists, but until now has been too expensive for the NHS to deliver,” explains Samantha. “They serve less than one per cent of the amputee population because of cost. Functionally, ours is very similar but much cheaper.”

Until then, the Hero Arm is available to buy in clinics across the UK. There has already been huge interest since the launch in April. “The response has been incredible,” says Samantha. “When we updated our website to launch the product, we had 400 amputees register overnight. That number has risen to more than 1,000 now, so we are looking at how fast we can make the prosthetics, and we are working with partner clinics across the UK to inform the amputees coming to us and asking for advice. The good thing is, to increase production, we just need to scale up our 3D printing!”

### NEW TECH IS ANYTHING BUT A NOVELTY

3D printing, a process by which materials are joined together under computer control, has made all this possible, explains Samantha. “Some people wrote off 3D printing as a novelty, thinking it was just for knick



knacks, but they underestimated the technology. It has allowed us to make devices very quickly and incredibly easily. Our materials are incredibly cost effective, too, and that is reflected in the price.

“And the printing process also means our arms are extremely customisable so people can personalise their prosthetics. We take the same approach as companies that make spectacles; glasses are a medical aid to help you see, but people spend a great deal of time thinking about what their glasses look like, and what they say about them personally. So we offer lots of designs and colours; from rainbow to neon glow in the dark. Our aim is to make beautiful bionic limbs.”

Open Bionics currently uses recycled plastic for elements of the product and the production process, but in the future aims to recycle the plastic components from old arms to make new ones.

The product doesn’t skimp on technology, either. Special sensors in the arm detect muscle movements, meaning the wearer is able to intuitively control the hand. Meanwhile, it has full medical approval, is FDC registered, and carries the CE mark. Thanks to extremely accurate fittings, says Samantha, it is

“**THE HERO ARM SETS OUT TO REPLICATE ALL THE MOVEMENT OF A HUMAN HAND, BUT WHAT SETS IT APART IS THE FACT THAT IT IS 3D PRINTED**”

## Flight of fancy

What happens when you aim high? (p28)



Hi-tech and highly customisable, the 3D-printed arm has full medical approval



comfortable, adjustable and breathable, making it very simple to put on and take off. “The product is made up of a very flexible material and liner, so the parts that touch the skin are soft, comfy and have good air ventilation,” says Samantha.

Open Bionics, meanwhile, sees its Hero Arm as the first of many products, all of which will use robotic technology to enhance the human body. “We have lots of plans,” says Samantha. “We have a great team of 13 engineers here, and we have a huge list of things that we’d like to build. We have the skills and we’re very dedicated, so it is very exciting. It’s been a bit of a blur since launching the Hero Arm, but we hope it is the start of something special. We’re excited to show people just what we can do.”

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Hero Arm should visit the Open Bionics website at [www.openbionics.com](http://www.openbionics.com), and register their interest. “Our team will then locate a partner clinic, and facilitate an appointment for a potential trial,” says Samantha.

*For more information about the Hero Arm and how it could help you, visit [www.openbionics.com](http://www.openbionics.com)*



GRAEAE 14-18 NOW Blesna  
Greenwich Docklands International Festival  
20 June & 1 July  
Stockton International Riverside Festival  
2 & 3 August 2011

Life Bars

# THIS IS NOT FOR YOU IS FOR YOU

THIS SUMMER, BLESMA MEMBERS WILL FEATURE IN A PRODUCTION TO COMMEMORATE THE END OF WWI. WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES

**S**winging high on a trapeze is a mental as well as a physical challenge, but Blesma Members have risen to the occasion for an epic performance that will pay tribute to wounded war veterans.

The theatre production, which is set to wow audiences with storytelling, music and physical theatre this summer, will hold a spotlight up to society's troubled track record of welcoming back Service men and women who have been left scarred and injured from serving their country.

*This Is Not For You* takes its title from a disparaging and all-too-real shout directed at a wheelchair-using veteran from a person in the Remembrance Sunday crowds near The Cenotaph several years ago.

"Someone shouted to a veteran; 'Oi, this is not for you; it's for the dead,'" says Jenny Sealey, the award-winning CEO and artistic director of Graeae Theatre Company, which will be staging the outdoor performance at two festivals this summer. "That comment showed a complete lack of understanding

or awareness of the sacrifices made by the living as well as the dead. This show will be a commemoration of the living, of those who came back disabled from WWI who have not been acknowledged. The dead are remembered, and rightly so, but too often the survivors are overlooked.

"I wanted to give a voice to those men and women in a way that is similar to how Blesma gives them a voice."

## A FITTING TRIBUTE

"Veterans have said it sometimes feels like it would be better to be dead because when you come back disabled you are like a bruise, a reminder of the atrocities of war," says Jenny, who worked with a number of Blesma Members when she directed the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. "You are trying to learn to live with your new body but you are in a hostile environment."

*This Is Not For You* is part of 14-18NOW's calendar of events that will mark the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI, which saw



Above: Performers including Carole King (right) get to grips with the demanding aspects of the performance during rehearsals

**“THEY HAVE APPROACHED THE PROJECT WITH OPENNESS AND ENTHUSIASM. THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL DISCIPLINE TO THEM; THE CAMARADERIE AND BANTER”**

thousands of men return with disabilities that disturbed the public and drew pitiful support from the state. The vacuum of care and comprehension was the catalyst for the formation of Blesma, which has helped wounded veterans for almost a century.

Fittingly, Blesma Members are among 24 military veterans who have been learning circus techniques as part of the innovative and compelling production.

“They have approached the whole project with openness and enthusiasm, pushing themselves to be abstract and adapting to the theatrical and creative process very quickly,” adds Jenny. “How they tackled the script and circus elements was incredible. Some of the apparatus is a bit daunting but they have just gone for it and I feel very lucky to work with them. There is a beautiful discipline to them; there’s the

camaraderie and the banter. Getting onto a trapeze with one arm or one leg is not easy, but they are natural problem solvers because of their military background.

“Being part of the project, meanwhile, will allow them to experience many new opportunities as performers and give them the experience to take that further.”

*This Is Not For You*, which will be performed at two prestigious outdoor festivals this summer, delves into the emotions of soldiers leaving for WWI only to return wounded to a society ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with their physical and psychological needs.

Set over three Armistice Days, it is in turn inspirational and entertaining –

**CAROLE KING**

*Carole, 51, served with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. She had to have her left leg amputated above the knee in 2006 after an accident*

**What was your reaction when you arrived at the first training session?**

I’d read about it in *Blesma Magazine* so knew a bit, but it was very challenging. I came with the attitude that I would give it a go, and have surprised myself by what I can do.

**What does it mean to you to take part?**

It’s been brilliant for me. I lost focus a couple of years ago and spent a lot of time in my house, so I needed something that would pull me out of that and this certainly has. I smile when I’m on the train going to rehearsals and I often tell people sitting near me what I’m doing. I started a blog from the first day and now have followers all over the world. It is great that more people are learning about what we can achieve.

**Do you enjoy the training and rehearsals?**

To be able to grow and progress with a group of like-minded people all supporting each other has been inspiring, and has given me so much confidence.

**What can it achieve in changing public attitudes?**

It’s about perseverance and being on a journey – anyone can identify with that. I’ve had so much support from people outside the military. It is great that it is spreading the word as I’m a different person because of the things I’ve done with Blesma. The Association is a fellowship and we gel together. We are all in the same boat.



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate



## KIRK BOWETT

*Kirk, a former Mercian Regiment corporal, lost his left arm below the elbow after injuries sustained while conducting security duties in Iraq in 2013*

### **How did you hear about *This Is Not For You*?**

Fellow Blesma Member Jez Scarratt, who I appeared in the TV programme *Hunted* with, has been a driving force to get more people involved and he told me about it. I thought it would be fun but had no idea how demanding it would be. We are learning circus skills, doing intense weekly sessions working on the trapeze and hoops.

### **How did you adapt to the different skill set?**

I've done climbing in the past, which was hard work – this is similar. Just getting on a trapeze is difficult and painful, so you have to build up your skills and stamina. We start with 40 minutes of military-style circuits to get warmed up, and then it is into the circus skills.

### **Is it all physical work?**

No, we're learning artistic performance skills, which takes us out of our comfort zone! We were given a cuboid, which will feature in the show, and told to think about PTSD and use the apparatus to express our interpretation!

### **How do you think the audience will react?**

I think they will be challenged. The production will strip away their preconceptions about disability as they will be seeing people with arms and legs missing, climbing apparatus. We have performers who are paraplegic and the audience will be amazed by what they have achieved and how we have worked as a team to help each other.

### **What do you hope the performances will achieve?**

It's important to get Blesma and limbless veterans into the public eye. It is good to commemorate the centenary of the end of WWI and, as a veterans' charity, Blesma needs to do something significant.

### **Will it help you and other Members in the future?**

Performing arts is about confidence building and team building. We have some Members who are a bit shy but who are really enjoying speaking and singing, and it has given them a real confidence boost. We've learnt about what we can achieve and have been given great advice about nutrition and fitness so that has been really useful. And performing on stage in front of an audience will give us all something extra to take forward.

**“I WANTED TO GIVE A VOICE TO THOSE MEN AND WOMEN IN A WAY THAT IS SIMILAR TO HOW BLESMA GIVES THEM A VOICE”**

with a music hall jollity – but at the same time it is powerfully thought provoking.

It features volunteer choirs and blind opera singer Victoria Oruwari, while the shifting emotions and storylines are told with acting, singing, and the impressive physical performances of Blesma’s Members.

“The impact of that war, and of all wars, was huge on the people who were there, as well as on their families,” adds Jenny. “We have these disabled characters trying to navigate their way in the world and they come together to have a drink and to remember. They are glued together because they were comrades, because you can’t take the service out of people; it is always there.

“But they are angry because they are being treated as second class citizens by society and see much more value in death than in losing a limb. When you come back disabled from any conflict, it is tough. The system is so brutal and all the time you are trying to adjust to the new you. Thank goodness for organisations like Blesma that help and guide people,” says Jenny.

“I would like the audience to enjoy the performance, and the work of Blesma Members, and to leave thinking about disability. We all need to support the fight



**Performers are taught aerial skills at the National Centre for Circus Arts in London**

against the cuts that are pushing people out of sight and out of mind. It is vital to talk about what happened in WWI and what is happening now.”

*The production **This Is Not For You** will be performed at the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal Riverside, Woolwich, on Saturday 30 June and*

*Sunday 01 July at 3pm and 7.30pm. It will then move to the Stockton International Festival in Stockton-on-Tees, with performances on Thursday 02 August at 8.30pm and Friday 03 August at 2.30pm and 7.30pm.*

*All performances will be free, with no booking needed, and will be fully accessible with creative British Sign Language and audio description.*



**PAUL STOCKER**

*Paul, 50, served as a radio operator in the Royal Navy and the Territorial Army. A complication from a surgery led to him losing his right arm above the elbow*

**What appealed to you about the project?**

Recovery through theatre is something I really enjoy. I started with the Royal British Legion’s *Bravo 22 Company* and have done other projects, but didn’t know what to expect from this. I’m hooked now! Who’d have thought I could get on a circus hoop or trapeze with one arm? Initially, I thought there was no way, but through the training, I’ve realised I can do more than I thought I could. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it.

**How has working with a tough subject matter been?**

I’ve got chronic PTSD and the first time I heard about the storyline I was a bit taken aback because I am struggling with issues. But it is handled very well. I am benefitting massively from being involved. It is good to be back working as part of a team again.

**What has been your favourite part of the project?**

Learning new skills has been great, and getting to know a new group of people has been brilliant. This is the first time I’ve done anything with Blesma or met fellow amputees on an organised event, and it’s been great because we help each other.

**What do you hope it will give to the public?**

A bit of an understanding of why we are the way we are and do the things we do. The audience will be able to enjoy the show and learn about how we are affected.

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# BLE SMA'S AIRBORNE FORCES

MEMBER ALEX KROL IS CERTAIN HIS PASSION FOR FLYING HAS HELPED WITH HIS REHABILITATION. SO HE SUGGESTED WE LET OTHER MEMBERS HAVE A GO



**S**oaring over the River Mersey in a single-engined aeroplane with the city of Liverpool below and the sunlit north west coast ahead of him, Alex Krol is living the dream. “Flying a plane is something everyone wants to do as a kid, isn’t it?” he asks nobody in particular. “We all wanted to be pilots when we were younger. I’m spinally injured, so I use a wheelchair all the time, but I can still get into a plane! If I wasn’t in the situation I’m in, I wouldn’t have had the chance to learn to fly. I feel very blessed and fortunate that I can do this!”

Alex, a former Royal Marine who was paralysed when a car pulled in front of his motorbike in 2005, is the epitome of Blesma positivity. “Like most people, I was quite lost for a while after being injured,” he admits, “but I applied for a flying scholarship for disabled people and I was sent to South Africa to learn how to fly. It was fantastic! Now I’m a qualified pilot and I do it as much as I can in my spare time. I’m passionate about it and I wanted to share that.”

Alex has spread his love of flying to fellow Blesma Members thanks to a recent appeal by the Association for Members to suggest ideas for new projects. Alex responded with a pitch for a beginners’ aviation day, an idea that was eagerly adopted by the Association. So today, eight Members are taking the controls for a maiden flight through the Merseyside skies.

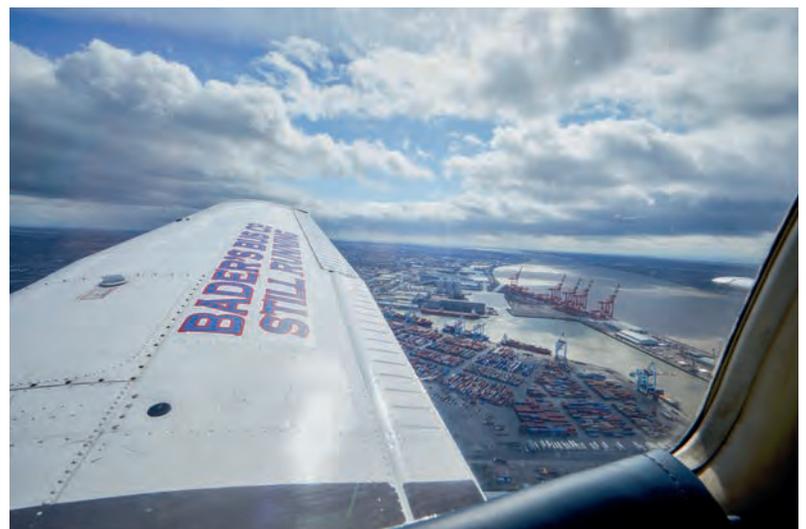
“I saw that Blesma was running a scheme in which Members could pitch an activity, so I went for it,” says Alex. “It was never going to be an easy pitch, because

flying is quite an expensive activity to run, and it would have been the first time the Association had offered flying lessons to its Members. But I think I put across a good case, and the team at Chadwell Heath were keen. Blesma has invested time, support and money into this, and that’s fantastic!”

#### ANYONE CAN GIVE IT A GO

The event is being held at John Lennon Airport in conjunction with specialist disability flying charity Aerobility. The aim is to give the eight Members who are taking part a fun and exciting introduction to

**Previous page:** It was Alex Krol’s idea for Blesma to run a flying course for Members.  
**This page:** Alex and Lee Bagley discuss the event, which was run in partnership with Aerobility



## SIMON KHAN

*Simon has lost his left leg above the knee*

### **You've got some experience of flying already, haven't you?**

Yes, I've done a few hours of trial flights in the past. I love flying, so I threw my name into the hat and was delighted to be accepted for this. I was still a bit apprehensive before going up – and I was the first to fly! – but Alex and the instructors were spot on. We had a decent flight over Liverpool, Wigan and Skelmersdale, and it was really enjoyable. We got thrown about a little bit at some points, which was part of the fun.

### **You used the regular controls, including the foot rudder...**

Yes. I'm an above-knee amputee, but I could operate the foot pedal alright with my prosthetic. Taxiing on the ground was something of a challenge, but a bit of brute force and ignorance got it done! In the air, using the rudder was fine – I just had to plan pushing my left hip!

### **And everyone else in the group seemed to enjoy it?**

Yes, it was a great atmosphere on the day. A few people came down a bit green, but everyone got something out of the event. An activity like this puts everyone on an even keel. I think it's great that Blesma lets Members lead the way with activity ideas; they're letting Members take the initiative, and that's important.



“THEY LET YOU TAKE CONTROL AND GET INVOLVED WITH FLYING THE PLANE. I’D REALLY LIKE TO GIVE IT ANOTHER GO”



## ANDY GRANT

*A former Royal Marine, Andy was injured in an IED blast in Afghanistan in 2009*

### **What attracted you to give flying a go?**

I already know Alex. He's a great guy and he absolutely loves flying, so I thought I'd see what it's all about. I did something similar for my 18th birthday, but the good thing with Aerobility is that they really let you take control and get involved with flying the plane. I didn't have any expectations before taking off, but I really enjoyed it. I'd really like to give it another go and I'll definitely be chatting to Alex about that.

### **What was the best part?**

I'm from Liverpool, so what I really loved about it was looking at my home city from the air. I'm from Bootle, so we actually flew over that way and went over my house. I was telling people all about it afterwards, it was very cool! We looked at the docks and various other parts of the city. Exploring your home city while flying a plane is great!

### **Was it tricky to get to grips with the controls?**

Not really. The instructors were great, and they didn't bog you down with too much detail – there was just the right amount of information so you knew what you were doing. Once we were at 1,000ft, they let us take the controls. I'm a below-knee amputee, so it worked well because everything was operated by hand controls.

a fully accessible aircraft as well as giving them the chance to interact with other Members. If, like Alex, they happen to pick up the flying bug and fancy taking it further, they'll be given helpful pointers, too.

"The guys on this course are all single below-knee amputees, but Aerobility can hoist someone like me, who needs a wheelchair, into the plane so anyone can do it, however severe their disability. Aerobility is a great charity that has helped me out a lot with discount flying, so it's great to see them collaborate with Blesma."

The adaptations to the plane controls are quite simple. "There are normally pedals to control the rudder, but an adapted plane replaces those with a mechanical device, so you use your hands rather than your feet. All the other dials, controls, and columns are the same. It's very easy and works well. I love flying because I can jump in a plane and fly it like anyone else would. It gives me a sense of freedom," says Alex.

**Eight Members took part in the activity. Drop the Activities Team a line if you fancy having a go**

**NOT A JOLLY (BUT JOLLY GOOD FUN!)**

The 45-minute taster flights take the Members up the coast beyond Southport, before banking around and flying back into the city. "It's not particularly far, but Liverpool is an amazing place to fly over because

you get to see the coast, the estuary, the docks... it's brilliant," says Alex. "It's not a jolly, either – this is a proper training flight. Everyone who is flying has hands-on experience, and as soon as they take off, the instructors give the controls to the Members and tell them what to do.

"One guy told me that he'd had a trial flight a few years ago, but he wasn't allowed to do anything. Here, they are doing it all – including the radio calls – so they all feel completely involved."

Alex has since pointed a number of participants in the direction of Aerobility and the scholarship he undertook. He's not surprised that his idea was a success, given how much being airborne has helped him. "Flying has been a massive part of my rehab and recovery," he says. "I served with the Royal Marines, and four years in I was ready to deploy, but unfortunately I had my bike accident. My service career was cut short. I was 22, and I was gutted. I'm still in touch with all my mates from the Marines and meet up with them regularly, but I know I missed out.

"I was dealing with hospitals and sorting things out at home, but then I got the chance to go to South Africa. I flew every day, the weather was great, and



**ANDREW FULLER**

*A former sergeant in the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, Andrew was injured when he was hit by a lorry*

**How was the day for you?**

It was really exciting. I've jumped out of the back of a plane before, but not piloted one! And I ended up doing an interview with a news reporter for *North West Tonight* before I went up.

**Did you find being at the controls nerve wracking?**

I was a bit nervous waiting around for my turn, but taking off was great, and once we were flying over the River Mersey and the Liver Building, it was amazing. You feel every bit of turbulence and wind in those planes though – we were dropping all over the place – but the instructor told me where to turn, and it was just a great experience. Once you've got it all straight in your head, it's a piece of cake!

**And anyone can do it...**

Yes. The controls are really easy to use. The guys couldn't do enough for us, and whatever your disability, they can get you in that plane.



**“IF I WASN'T IN THIS SITUATION, I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD THE CHANCE TO LEARN TO FLY. I FEEL INCREDIBLY BLESSED AND FORTUNATE THAT I CAN DO THIS!”**

it was a superb course. I came back with my pilot's licence, and I've kept going as much as I've been able to. I see flying as a gift, and so it has given me a real sense of fulfilment to help others try it. The lads who have come along today were all very excited, and all were very appreciative and grateful at the end of the day. Hopefully, I've fired some enthusiasm!”

As is always the case at Blesma events, Alex's flying day hasn't just been about the activity itself. The social side has been just as helpful, with Members helping each other in a variety of ways. “You've got eight guys who've never flown before and they have had the chance to experience something new,” says Alex. “For me, it would have been enough if they'd just had a nice day and never done it again, so it's been brilliant that they're keen to take it further.

“But the day has not just been about the flying. We have spent all day together and the lads have been speaking to each other about prosthetics and other Blesma activities that they've been on – all the usual

things that Members discuss when they get together. People have come here from all over the country too, and I thought that was very supportive. It's great to have positive feedback, and so we will hopefully push on from here.”

*Is there an activity that you would like Blesma to offer Members? You can pitch your idea at [www.blesma.org/activitiesproposal](http://www.blesma.org/activitiesproposal) and to take a look at the current Activities Programme, visit [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities)*

**ALEX'S TOP TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR BLESMA PITCH A SOARING SUCCESS**

**Got an activity you would like Blesma to run? Why not get in touch?**

**Go with something you love**

“I've put a lot of time and energy into flying,” says Alex, “it's a passion, so it's great to be able to communicate that enthusiasm to other Members. Clearly explain the reasons why you want to put on an event, and how it will benefit Members.”

**Think the idea through**

“Work on your costs and must-know information to make sure it is all correct. It will save Blesma having to keep coming back to you with questions.”

**Work with Blesma**

“Blesma makes the whole process of pitching an idea very easy. I filled in a form online but always felt I could ask questions throughout the process. Blesma never said no to my idea, and I felt I had the opportunity to change certain details as we went through the process. Blesma thought it'd be worth it, so be ambitious.”



# The best retirement community in the world

**FORGET A FREE BUS PASS, THERE ARE FAR MORE PERKS TO BEING A PENSIONER WHEN YOU LIVE AT THE ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA**

**I**t's no exaggeration to say that The Royal Hospital Chelsea is one of the finest, if not THE finest, retirement home in the world. Situated over 66 glorious acres, amid some of the most exclusive real estate in one of the planet's most expensive cities, it's nothing short of mind-blowing. Given that it was established in 1682 by King Charles II, and designed by Sir Christopher Wren, who also drew up the plans for St Paul's Cathedral, there's no wonder.

As well as the practical, carefully renovated rooms for residents (with study, wet room and bedroom), it has a modern gym with hydrotherapy pool, a glorious Great Hall (where breakfast and lunch are taken), a stunning chapel, sports facilities, bowling green, and a bar. The site plays host to events such as the famous Chelsea Flower Show, and numerous other arts, sports and musical events throughout the year.

But it's not just the delightful surroundings that make this place so special: when it comes down to it, it's all about the people. There are currently 288 pensioners resident, but the Hospital has capacity for

310 and is actively looking for more residents. Blesma Members are encouraged to consider joining: with a full range of care available and great accessibility throughout, it's the ideal place for anyone struggling on their own or looking for a new life packed with military camaraderie.

## **IT WAS LIKE COMING HOME AGAIN**

Pete Turner, 67, who only became a resident in January, isn't a Blesma Member, but is a typical example of someone who has benefited greatly from his new home.

"My life changed very quickly," he says. "My wife and I had lots of plans when I retired but then my son, two daughters and grandchildren all moved away from our area – and then my wife passed away. I was suddenly incredibly lonely, and there wasn't anyone around me who knew what I'd been through. But then I came here, and it was like coming home again. It has been just brilliant, and my life is absolutely full."

Jo Molendo, the Hospital's Social Care Manager, is quick to explain that a huge part of the establishment's



From left: George, Pete and Lawrence photographed in the Royal Hospital's chapel



Lawrence and George have only known each other for a matter of weeks. Not that you'd know it!



ethos is encapsulated by residents helping each other out. “We take new residents on the understanding that they have a sense of community spirit and want to get involved,” she says. “Whatever they are able to contribute, we will ask them to do that. It’s about being a good comrade and a good neighbour. That’s what makes this place tick, and what’s really special about it.

“To come here, you must be able to live independently on our Long Wards. But we can immediately call upon a full care service if it becomes necessary. We have domiciliary care as well as a care home in the infirmary. There’s no need to leave if you require more support, because we have GPs, a therapy team, occupational therapists and physios all on site.”

Chelsea Pensioners are well known for popping up in full regalia at high-profile events such as Trooping

the Colour. Being seen at public events is considered to be a proud tradition at the Hospital, and links into a loose-but-evident military structure that prevails throughout the establishment.

Captain George Cochlan is a Captain of Invalids (there is one for each of the Hospital’s four wings). It’s a historic title from the former Royal Corps of Invalids (the Pensioners still have ‘RCI’ on their buttons), which represented injured soldiers. George is in charge of a wing of 79 residents which is organised much like a military company. “My second in command here is the Company Sergeant Major, an in-pensioner who I talk to every single morning to see if there are any issues,” George explains. “And our Long Ward Reps are basically like Platoon NCOs – they keep the rest of the wing informed. It’s very similar to the military.

## LAWRENCE JABLONSKI, 71

**You’re a Blesma Member, how did it suit you coming to the Royal Hospital Chelsea?**

I came here five years ago, and before that I was in normal digs back home in South Wales. That wasn’t so good, but here I’ve got a place with no worries in the world. It doesn’t matter what you’ve got or think you’re missing in life, you don’t need anything to be happy here, this place has it all. I’m very, very happy. It’s out of this world, this place, to be honest. It’s very accessible, and it is perfectly set up for me, with my leg amputation. I can’t recommend it enough to Blesma Members.

**What does a normal day here entail?**

Some people do all sorts, but I keep quite quiet. I like to make models of military planes and boats. They’re big – some of them have taken me a couple of years to finish! I enjoy chatting to people and I really like the food. It’s a challenge not to eat too much because there is a great breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**Tell us about your injury...**

I served with the Royal Welch Fusiliers but I was injured in a car accident in my early twenties. Someone came around a roundabout the wrong way and hit me. I struggled after that, but coming here has helped me a lot. It’s nice to have the support



## RETIREMENT



“The in-pensioners have breakfast and lunch in their blue uniforms, and we often form collaborations with the National Army Museum, which is next door, to capture people’s stories. We take part in the Governor’s parade every Sunday between April and October, and residents are expected to attend at least once a year, if they can. They are presented to the Governor and any visiting regimental guests, and are inspected before we all head into the chapel for Sunday service.

“Then there’s our big annual parade on Founder’s Day to mark the birthday of King Charles II, which this year was held on 07 June. It’s a full parade, and even involves a member of the Royal Family as the reviewing officer. It’s an amazing sight; everyone is there, marching along in their scarlet uniforms to the sound of *The Boys of the Old Brigade*, buttons sparkling, and it’s a chance for pensioners to invite their friends and family along.”

But beyond the ceremonies, residents can be as busy or as quiet as they like. “The pensioners are invited to some 500 different events every year, from the Flower Show to fine art exhibitions, equestrian events and football matches,” says Jo. “I hear amazing stories

from residents every day; not just about their military careers, but also about what they did yesterday!”

Residents are free to wear their (less formal) blue uniforms within a two-mile radius of the Hospital, but further afield, they’re expected to don their scarlets. “When you come here, one thing to get to grips with is what it means to put the scarlet on,” explains Jo. “Most of our pensioners enjoy the attention they get from the outfit. They know it is famous and, of course, they’re a well-known sight at Chelsea football matches. The team are nicknamed the Chelsea Pensioners, and they give us tickets for home games, which is very kind.”

**Above: breakfast and lunch are both served in the Great Hall, offering the perfect chance to relax and chat**

### IT’S AFFORDABLE FOR ANYBODY

Residents who are eligible for an Army pension, be it service occupational pension or pension for injury (including War Disability Pension, Armed Forces Independence Payment, and Guaranteed Income Payment) must surrender it in return for board and lodgings at the Royal Hospital, but Jo says that the rewards they get mean they all do so willingly.

“We look at everyone’s affordability separately and we never ask pensioners to contribute more than they



### GEORGE REED, 85

**You’re the new kid on the block at 85...**

Yes, I’m just above the average joining age, I think! I’ve been here for just a few weeks now but I’m fitting in very well. I’m looking forward to a couple of decades here!

**How are you settling in?**

It is the best thing I could have done in my circumstances. I lost my wife a couple of years ago, and my two daughters promised that they’d look after me. They’ve been doing a great job but they’ve got their own families to worry about.

**What do you like to do here?**

I just love the grounds; they’re beautiful. I walk around them in the morning, a full lap! I like being in central London too, it’s very handy to be able to just go into town. And all the healthcare you might need is on hand, so that’s very convenient. I’ve made some very good friends already, especially my next door neighbour.

**And you enjoy the military aspect of life here?**

Very much. It’s what I’ve known all my life, really. Since I was in the Army Cadets, then the Regulars with the Royal Engineers, then the TA for 21 years I’m used to uniform. We have all kinds of soldiers here and that’s very interesting. One of my neighbours is 96 and was in WWII, so I have lots of great chats with him!

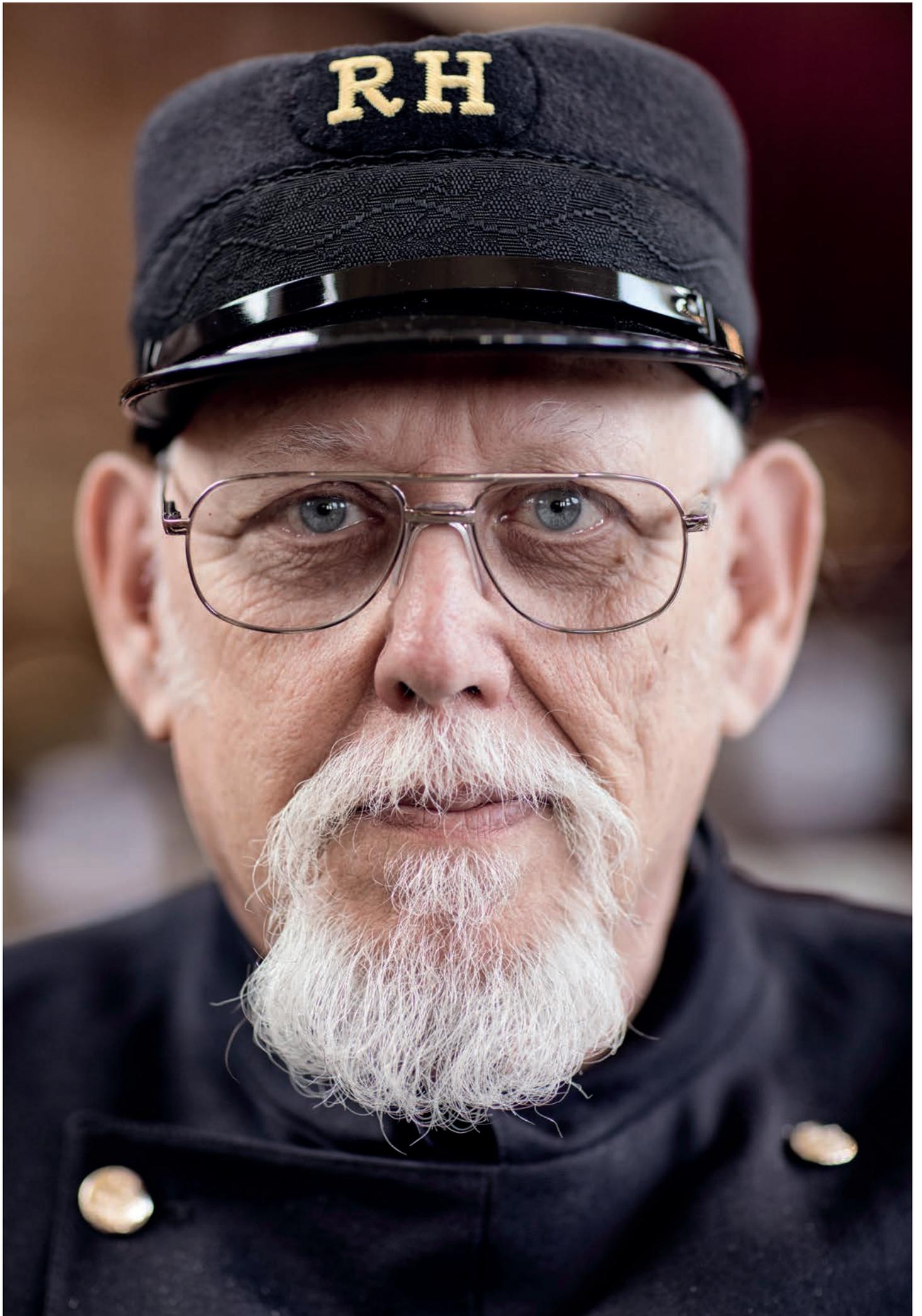


## HOW YOU CAN BE SEEN IN SCARLET

*To become a Chelsea Pensioner, you must be a former non-commissioned officer or soldier of the British Army who is:*

- **Over 65 years** or of State Pension age (whichever is the greater)
- **Either in receipt of an Army Service Pension** or War Disability Pension which you would be required to surrender upon entry to the Royal Hospital OR, if you do not receive an Army Pension, you would be required to make a weekly financial contribution (payable by Standing Order) towards your living costs. This contribution will be based on an assessment of affordability completed during the application process. Please note, if you are in receipt of an Army Service Pension and/or War Disability Pension you may also be required to make a top-up contribution (also based on an assessment of affordability)
- **Free of any financial** obligation to support a spouse or family
- **To be able to live** independently in the sheltered accommodation (Long Wards) – the Royal Hospital Chelsea is unable to accept direct entries to the nursing wards
- **Also eligible for admission** are any former officers of the British Army who meet the criteria, provided they served for at least 12 years in the ranks before obtaining a commission or if they were awarded a disablement pension while serving in the ranks.

*If you are interested in joining the Royal Hospital please speak to your Blesma Support Officer*



can afford. They're getting accommodation, meals, utilities, council tax, TV licence, uniforms, travel, events, and all the facilities. And they have their regular pension, so they keep a protected income."

All in all, it's the sort of place where many Blesma Members of a certain age would feel at home. "I'd say to any Member that the shared experience is a huge part of this place. If you are stuck on your own, feeling like the civvies around you don't understand you, don't have your sense of humour or your abundance of stories, you should consider coming here," says Jo.

"That's the type of person who would benefit from being part of the gang here. They'd be immediately accepted. Our residents have all sorts of different personalities and they come from all over the UK. Whether you want to share a cup of tea or a drink in the bar, you will find like-minded people and great company. What you get here is amazing!"

*Part of the application process includes a short stay at the Hospital. It is an opportunity for the applicant and the Hospital to decide if it is the right move for both parties. Anyone interested in becoming an in-pensioner should consult their BSO. Find out more at [www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk](http://www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk)*



**PAUL FINDLAY, BSO**

*The Royal Hospital Chelsea is part of Paul's patch as a Support Officer*

**What do you think of the Hospital?**

I've been here a lot, and I think it is a wonderful place. It's right in the heart of London, so to be in this affluent area, in amazing accommodation, and to be looked after in such a way, is phenomenal. There is no care facility that can rival this in terms of location, events and opportunities.

**The military spirit is evident everywhere you look, too...**

It reminds me of Blesma in terms of the camaraderie and the way it works. It is a great place for people who are at a point in their lives where they just want to relax and enjoy themselves. Here, you can live life and enjoy other people's company, and for a lot of people that is much better than being stuck in their own home. I know that

continuing a military style of life is not for everyone, but many Members would love it. It's a structured life that benefits a lot of people, so I'd encourage any eligible Member to seriously think about coming here.

**It's well set up for Members, too...**

Seeing the way the guys are together, and the way the new arrivals fit in, I don't think any Blesma Member coming here would have a problem. It is totally set up, accessibility wise. There is top medical care, so I know that any Member who comes here will be in great hands. I know they'll get support, meals, medical care... You can't be sure of all that out in the community. This is a great network, and an organisation we have great trust in. I totally recommend it.

**PETE TURNER, 67**

**You only arrived in January didn't you, have you made many friends here?**

Yes, you have no choice! I'm really enjoying it. I came on the four-day trial and really loved it, I was welcomed with open arms. It's totally different from anywhere else – we all support each other and get together to sort things out if required.

**You applied after finding yourself isolated from your family. How is life now?**

It's wonderful. I use the gym every day and I do lots of woodwork – I've got a workshop for all my tools. I make things for people all around the Hospital; plaques and all sorts. I love fishing, so I keep that up as much as I can. The head gardener here is a keen fisherman, so we have teamed up and go out a lot. I've been invited to lots of other things, too – the Army vs Navy rugby match, Crufts, the dawn Anzac Service, my first ever football match, to Portsmouth to visit the Navy...

**But none of it is compulsory?**

Not at all. You can be as quiet or as active as you like.

**And you've got a Blesma connection?**

Yes, my wife was a Member. I was in the REME for 25 years and she was in the WRAC. She was injured in a truck accident so I've been to a few Blesma dinners over the years. It's a great charity.





**Jon-Allan Butterworth**

**J**on-Allan Butterworth MBE (left) is perhaps one of the UK's best-known Paralympians. After losing an arm in a 2007 rocket attack in Iraq, he went on to become a triple silver medalist in cycling at the London 2012 Paralympic Games, and followed that up with a gold medal in the Rio Games in 2016. But now, when he's competing in his new favourite elite sport – endurance motor racing – he's all but invisible behind his helmet and race suit. And that's just how he likes it.

“When you're competing in the Paralympics, you're at the peak of what you can achieve in your sport, and that's fantastic,” he says, “but your injury is totally visible. To anyone watching endurance motorsport, I'm just one car racing another. And when it comes to the other drivers, nobody knows – or cares – that I've got a disability. They're just trying to overtake me. I'm competing on a totally level playing field with able-bodied drivers.”

Jon-Allan has just been hurtling around the stunning Anglesey Circuit in North Wales as part of a three-hour endurance



# FROM ANGLESEY TO LE MANS

TEAM BRIT IS AIMING TO MAKE HISTORY BY BECOMING THE FIRST ALL-DISABLED TEAM TO COMPETE IN THE LE MANS 24 HOUR RACE. BUT FIRST, IT'S TIME FOR A BIT OF FUN

race in the Fun Cup series. This is a fast and furious business featuring some excellent and experienced drivers racing cars with Beetle chassis that have been kitted out with VW Golf Mk2 engines. Jon-Allan is driving for Team BRIT, an outfit made up entirely of disabled drivers and crew, including a number of Blesma Members.

Formed by Dave Player in 2014, the team is not a charity and doesn't expect favours because of the participants' injuries. What's more, they're aiming to get to the world-famous Le Mans 24 Hour Race on merit.

"In 2010, I set up the charity KartForce with the aim of getting injured veterans into karting," explains Dave, who was paralysed in an accident in 1991, and has dedicated much of his life since then to organising para-sport. "We've helped so many injured guys in the past 25 years. There are more disabled racing drivers in the UK than the rest of the world put together, and half of them have come through KartForce and Team BRIT."

The health benefits that motor racing offers injured troops have been scientifically



Ash Hall



Previous page: The Team BRIT Fun Cup car blasts around the Anglesey Circuit  
 This page: Jon-Allan (top and above right) and Ash (middle right) prepare to compete in the three-hour race

verified by a University of Nottingham study. “They analysed what we did and were blown away by the results,” says Dave. “For lads with physical injuries, they feel normal behind the wheel. On the track, everyone is exactly the same, all opponents respect each other. You don’t get any of the ‘Oh, are you OK?’ tippy-toes stuff that we can often face off the track.

“And for guys with mental issues who struggle on a daily basis, it’s even better. It can sometimes take ages to build up the confidence to get behind the wheel, but once they start driving, the effects are amazing. The adrenaline starts flowing,

and as soon as they take the helmet off, you can see their eyes bulging out of their heads. It gives people confidence, and it often gives them the strength to go on and change other parts of their lives.”

**FROM FUN TO LE MANS**

With KartForce proving such a success, Dave decided to take motorsport to the next level. The Fun Cup followed, and Team BRIT are now also taking part in the GT4 series, racing an Aston Martin. The aim is to then step up to GT3 before racing at Le Mans in a GTE car by 2020. “It’s a massive challenge and we gave ourselves five years

to make it,” says Dave. “It requires a lot of money, but we’ve already met with Aston Martin and the ACO, who organise the Le Mans race. They thought we might want a wildcard entry, but we don’t. We’re British and proud, and we don’t want to sneak in through the back door. Our drivers are already competing within the lap time criteria for entry.

“The plan is to enter the Le Mans Festival races and the Le Mans Cup in 2019 and 2020, which will help make us eligible and will also mean that when our drivers get to the 24 Hour, they won’t be novices.”

The professional approach, Dave stresses, means that only the most determined and dedicated injured veterans are considered for the team. “We aren’t a charity and I need people who are willing to try karting first, build up their experience, be reliable, and work for their place.” The Blesma Members who have made the team, like

**“THERE ARE MORE DISABLED RACING DRIVERS IN THE UK THAN THE REST OF THE WORLD. HALF OF THEM HAVE COME THROUGH KARTFORCE AND TEAM BRIT”**

## ASH HALL

*Ash lost his legs above the knee in Afghanistan in 2010. He joined Team BRIT in 2017*

### **What attracted you to Team BRIT and motorsport?**

I've always loved cars, and was a mechanic before I joined the Royal Engineers. After the Invictus Games last year, Dave Player asked me if I wanted to try out, and I loved it. I'd done karting, but the hand controls in a Fun Cup car are very different – it's a really steep learning curve! I've got to grips with it though.

### **What is the standard of racing like in the series in general?**

It's really high. You're competing against ex-Touring Car drivers and guys who have come from being paid as professionals. It's hard to overtake those guys – you need a lot of skill and some real nerve. But coming from one of the most dangerous jobs in the world means that's not too much of a problem!

### **What aspects of motorsport do you enjoy the most?**

I get a buzz out of the racing – it does get the adrenaline going, but it's also great being with the team. There's a feeling of being part of something – that military sense of humour. And you have to be professional, too – everyone has to work, bring in sponsorship, stick to a standard, and present themselves right on social media. And I love the ambition.

### **What are your personal goals within the team?**

I'd love to improve and get in the GT4 car. But I'd also love to open the door so more disabled people can get into the sport – maybe train them up in a coaching role.





## **JON-ALLAN BUTTERWORTH**

*Jon-Allan lost his left arm above the elbow in Iraq in 2007. He joined Team BRIT last season and continues to cycle at an international level*

### **What drew you to Team BRIT?**

I already had a track car and had done some races for Mission Motorsport, but it was frustrating waiting a long time between races. What really appeals here is the big ambition, taking part in a journey like I did to the Paralympics, but this time to Le Mans.

### **What is the secret to excelling at endurance racing?**

Not getting too emotional or seeing the red mist when you're on track. You don't need to overdo it in endurance racing, that's when you have accidents. You need to go fast but it's a long game. You can crash, go back to the garage and still win the race. I like thinking all the time, using my brain.

### **What's it like driving the Fun Cup car with one arm?**

It's something we're still working on because the steering isn't reliable yet – it was overheating towards the end of my half-hour stints. It's quite tiring on my arm! Oddly enough though, the higher up you go through the categories, the easier the cars are to steer.

### **How far can Team BRIT go?**

I really think we can get to Le Mans, but the key thing will be doing OK there. Sure, it's a story if an all-disabled team gets to the 24 Hour race, but we want to go there and be competitive.



**Top: Ash makes last minute adjustments to his prosthetics – and his car!  
Above: Cars with Beetle chassis and VW Golf engines battle it out for the Fun Cup**

Jon-Allan and Ash, have demonstrated this. Blesma provides some funding to cover their travel and accommodation costs when they are training and competing, and gives them grants to buy items of kit for racing in. But the commitment is down to the individual.

“These drivers are fearless. They are the lads who like to push themselves physically and mentally. When you take a corner at 100mph and think you’re going to crash, the automatic thing to do is brake – but that’s the worst move you can make, you’ve got to go faster to pull the car to the ground. This is a sport for thrill-seekers, those who thrive on living on the edge.

“You also need to have an open mind and a brain like a sponge. You’ve got to listen to the instructors and do what they tell you. That way, you’ll improve and go faster.”

Team BRIT can accommodate triple and potentially even quadruple amputee drivers thanks to some clever adaptations. Blesma Member and triple amputee Lamin Manneh is among those currently having a trial, and a special simulator has been built to allow him to learn how to race.

“When I started in karting the hand controls were rubbish,” says Dave, “so I’ve been working at it. A lower limb amputee race car driver needs to do everything with

their hands that an able-bodied driver does with their feet, so we’ve designed the world’s most advanced hand controls. There’s a right hand paddle for the throttle and a left hand paddle for the brake. You gear up and down with your thumb. The concept is simple, but the tech is complex.

“Lamin has shown he’s serious, so we needed to see if it was possible. We’ve come up with seat insert moulds that fit around him, so he can work the throttle and brake paddles with his thighs.”

It’s the kind of innovative thinking that has made Team BRIT an addiction for those who get involved. “I love the idea of the journey to Le Mans,” says Jon-Allan from the pit wall in slightly less glamorous Anglesey. “I hope the way I’ve progressed through cycling can help me. I love to learn, so I want to help the team move up through the pack and get better every year.” Watch this space!

**“WE’RE BRITISH AND PROUD, AND WE DON’T WANT TO SNEAK IN THROUGH THE BACK DOOR. OUR DRIVERS ARE ALREADY IN THE TIMES FOR ENTRY”**



## STEVE McNEICE

*Steve McNeice, 57, served in the Territorial Army and was living a regular life as an accountant when he was struck by a life-threatening bacterial infection in 2003*

**I grew up in Moss Side and left school at 16. I got a job as a trainee accountant at the Co-op and joined the TA at 25 for some adventure. It was the mid-eighties, so we weren't really called on in a military sense, but I loved it.**

**Work commitments forced me to work across the South East and Germany. But in 2003 I was at an exclusive event in France and ate a sandwich that had a bug on it called Group A Streptococcal. It mutated in my stomach and attacked me through my bloodstream, and so I started to die from the extremities.**

**I was in hospital for 17 months. I lost both legs above the knee as well as the muscles in my right arm. I lost my fingertips and a little finger. I'm deaf in my left ear and have only 30 per cent hearing in my right. My lung capacity is significantly reduced after they filled with blood in an operation.**

**I'm a 'glass half full' person, so had a positive attitude from day one. I had been a triathlete and had run the London marathon three times, so I was physically fit and mentally strong.**

**At hospital, they didn't think I would walk again and said I should get used to being in a wheelchair. But my competitive streak came out and I treated rehab like a triathlon; breaking down individual functions so I could control each one and exploit it to the max.**

**In 2005 I was the first double above-knee amputee to get two C-legs through the NHS, and in 2012 the first NHS patient to benefit from two Geniums. I generally walk unaided, although I still have mishaps and falls, but it's a privilege to be up and about. I don't want to walk huge distances as it's about doing little and often to maintain my mobility and independence.**

**I find myself in awe of other Blesma Members. There's so much humour and banter, and I am still learning so much from others. I'm inspired listening to other people's stories, and I've improved my public speaking skills through initiatives like the Blesma Community Programme.**

**"I FIND MYSELF IN AWE OF OTHER BLESMA MEMBERS. THERE'S SO MUCH HUMOUR AND BANTER, AND I LEARN SO MUCH FROM OTHERS"**

**I've been privileged to be a National Limb Loss Patient Representative since 2005, representing patients at NHS England, Health Education England and the Department of Health. I try to take our collective patient experiences and use them to help improve services nationally and locally. I also help run the Westminster Cross-Party Limb Loss Group, and I am the Sutton and Merton Branch Ambassador.**

**I desperately 'try' to play golf and I swim regularly. I enjoy photography, drawing and painting. I find them all mentally therapeutic. When I'm drawing, I'm in the moment and I forget about everything else. I believe that life is what you make it and the prize is worth the effort.**

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## Jordan's biggest achievement? Let's talk fatherhood

Jordan Creeney's military career was ended after he was crushed by an armoured vehicle on a tour of Afghanistan in 2013

He sustained serious leg injuries that resulted in amputation in 2015, several years after trying to salvage his limb in vain.

The psychological effect of losing a limb can be significant and this was certainly no different for Jordan. He'd held out for as long as possible before the inevitable amputation and it was a tough time for him and his family, especially with an eagerly-expected baby on the way, with his long-term partner Amy.

The drive to be an active dad, very much involved in his son's early life, was key to Jordan's remarkably quick rehabilitation at Headley Court.

Jordan healed well and was soon up and about and caring for his baby son and getting physically stronger by the day.

Since those early days, Jordan says that he lives his life doing everything he can "simply to the best level" that he can. He is extremely active, training in the gym daily as well as running, hiking, cycling and motorcycling.



He is studying for a degree in Business Management and has become very knowledgeable about the design and functionality of his Össur prosthetic limb, often giving valuable feedback to his prosthetists. Furthermore, Jordan will shortly be setting off on a long-planned, exciting adventure to the USA with Amy and his son.

This is Jordan's journey. A normal life and personal achievements. His pathway may have taken a different turn but one so much more challenging and enriching, that of being a father.