

**INSIDE:**  
D-Day remembered  
The work of the VPP  
Boxing for Blesma  
The life of Jim Page



# CONQUERING EVEREST

*How Martin Hewitt flew the flag for Blesma  
at the pinnacle of Planet Earth*

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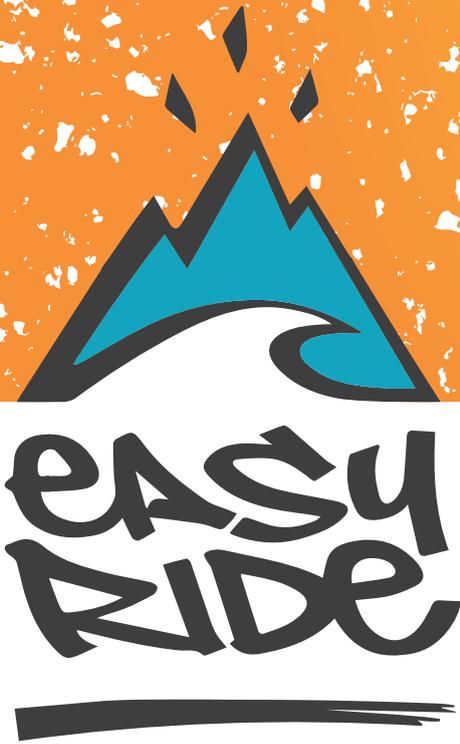
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# NEWS

*News, views and opinion  
from the world of Blesma*



The new Blesma office in Chelmsford is expected to be ready in September

Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photographs: Brian Chenier

## Blesma to be a new face in the city of Chelmsford

**T**he decision on the future of the Blesma office at Chadwell Heath has been finalised and the Board of Trustees has chosen to relocate the office to Chelmsford, Essex.

Following advice from a number of surveyors and agents, the Board concluded that Frankland Moore House is no longer fit for purpose and it would be more cost effective in the long term, as well as being in the best interests of the Association, to purchase the more suitable and accessible building in Chelmsford.

In its current state, Frankland Moore House would need to undergo a major refurbishment as it is not fully accessible to Members or Trustees, nor is it fully utilised as a resource by Blesma, with

one floor going unused. The House, which has been occupied by Blesma since 1965, also faces increasing health, safety and environmental risks as the building deteriorates and regulatory standards rise.

Surveyors have estimated that a full refurbishment could cost in excess of £1.5 million and in the long term would not provide as good a return on investment as the purchase of the new premises. After taking all those points into consideration, the Board of Trustees decided to sell Frankland Moore House and find a new property that was more appropriate for both Members and staff.

“It was the right time to make a decision and the Trustees have the longer-term interests of the Association very much

in mind,” said Blesma’s Chief Executive Barry Le Grys. “They have been really diligent in the planning and getting the best value for money for the Association.”

### **BEST PLACE IN EAST ENGLAND**

The new office will be located in the City of Chelmsford, in Essex. It is a 15-minute walk to Chelmsford train station, which is on the Great Eastern Main Line. There is a direct railway service from Chelmsford to London Liverpool Street with journey times of approximately 35 minutes.

Chelmsford also adjoins the A12, which leads directly to the M25 (J28), as well as the M11, which is just 12 miles to the west via the A414. The city is located 30 miles north-east of London and was granted



## D-Day 75 years on

Meet Members who were there (p22)

city status in 2012. In 2018, *The Sunday Times* voted Chelmsford the best place to live in the East of England.

Unlike Chadwell Heath, the new building on New London Road offers access to each floor of the three-storey self-contained office via a lift and staircase. It is hoped that this will lead to more Member and staff interaction at the office. The relocation will also offer a far more efficient and sleeker working environment for Blesma staff, Members and Trustees.

One of the floors will be unused by Blesma and will be let out to pay the building overheads. Each floor will consist of a combination of open desks, meeting rooms, and facilities. For the first time, Blesma will be able to invite all Trustees into a boardroom at head office.

### AN AUTUMN MOVE

The new office in Chelmsford is currently undergoing some renovations on a strict budget, including upgrading the lift so that it is fully compliant, and modernising the accessibility and working office space while staff remain at Chadwell Heath. Once refurbished, the office will be a far greater asset to the Association.

The move to Chelmsford is planned for September and preparations are underway to ensure there is no impact on the day-to-day business of the Association and its support to Members during the move. At the time of writing, all staff intend to make the move and recognise its advantages.

Contracts have now been exchanged and the Chadwell Heath office has been sold. The total costs of both the selling of the office in Chadwell Heath and purchase and refurbishment of the Chelmsford office will be finalised in next year's accounts.



**“IT WAS THE RIGHT TIME TO MAKE A DECISION AND THE TRUSTEES HAVE THE LONGER-TERM INTERESTS OF THE ASSOCIATION IN MIND”**



# welcome

We have just returned from a full and lively Members' Weekend in Oxfordshire. You can read all about it in the supplement included in this edition.

The Association's Annual General Meeting was an important part of the itinerary at Members' Weekend, giving the



opportunity for the National Chairman to set out how the Association has been doing and to give some intentions for the future. Trustees caught up with the membership and sought their views.

The Trustees were glad to confirm that the Outreach Officers pilot programme will continue to run beyond the current Libor Grant funding. To date the Outreach Officers have been successful in establishing regional networks and energising Blesma in their areas. We aim to build on this.

Also, Making Generation R is to keep running and we look forward to training up to 60 Members and reaching out to more than 20,000 youth and first responders in the forthcoming academic year on the theme of personal resilience. The Chairman reinforced the need for the Board of Trustees to consistently refresh their number and they wish to advertise for a Member to join the Board over the next 12 months. Please see the insert in this issue of the magazine for more on this.

The move of the Office from Chadwell Heath to Chelmsford is progressing on good terms as the Chairman noted at Members' Weekend. We held a service of remembrance as is custom and the Padre stressed the importance of companionship and advice. There was evidence of plenty of both at the Weekend. Given that both are core to the Association's proposition, this is most reassuring.

Best wishes for the summer months.

**Barry Le Gry**  
Chief Executive



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## Hope for veterans suffering from PTSD

**A** former Royal Marine who lost both his legs serving in Afghanistan has been spending time with baby rhinos in South Africa in a unique project that helps veterans who suffer from PTSD.

Last November, Peter Dunning joined the Footprints of Hope project organised by Veterans for Wildlife, a charity that is committed to the protection of wildlife and critically endangered species. Initially, the programme introduced veterans to different forms of yoga, journaling and art therapy



Peter spent time with baby rhinos in South Africa



before the group of five veterans spent two weeks at the Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary.

The project used a combination of mentoring, TRIM (Traumatic Incident Management), yoga, therapeutic art, mindfulness and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) to offer veterans ways to cope with negative emotions and work towards Post Traumatic Growth.

“It was an amazing project. We were really able to get hands-on with different aspects of caring for the baby rhinos – from feeding them to mucking out their

pens,” said Peter. “It was a beneficial project as there was also a clinical psychiatrist on site who worked with us in groups and individually. The experience has given us the tools we need to help ourselves when we return home to our everyday lives.”

When the group of veterans returned to the UK from South Africa, they attended post-deployment contact sessions to round off their experience and to ensure that the personal coping techniques and skills that they had been introduced to would be carried through as long-term habits.

## A MARATHON EFFORT BY BLESMA'S FEARLESS FUNDRAISERS

Blesma Members Jack Cummings, Danny Green and Ray Evans joined fundraisers and supporters Robi Dutta, Susan Bonnar, Sally Asquith, Malcolm MacDougall and Adam Collington in April to take on the London Marathon and raise vital funds for the Association.

Former Sapper Jack (near right), who lost both his legs whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2010, completed the course in his Blesma-funded everyday manual wheelchair in four hours and 10 minutes.

“Being a full-time wheelchair user, I saw the marathon as the ultimate challenge,” said Jack after the event. “Mine has been a long journey of recovery but I have overcome my injuries with the love and support of my family and friends, and incredible charities like Blesma.

“I set challenges to keep physically active and motivated – training for them keeps my mind focused and gives me something to work towards. I absolutely loved the London Marathon. The atmosphere was amazing; I’ve never experienced anything like it. People were cheering my name the whole way around. It really motivated me.”

So far, sponsorship of Blesma’s marathon men and women has raised more than £16,000 for the Association.





**Blesma's bobsleigh bronze medalist Corie Mapp gets in the zone**

## Corie Mapp wins bob bronze

**B**lesma-sponsored athlete Corie Mapp has won bronze overall at the Para-Bobsleigh World Cup. After the final race of the season at St Moritz in February, Corie had notched up 868 points in 10 races to secure a podium position for the fourth time in as many years.

“Earning another medal in the World Cup series, where your consistency and response to set backs are more important than one-off performances, means a lot to me,” Corie said of his achievement.

Corie lost both his legs in an explosion in Afghanistan in 2010 when his military vehicle hit an IED. Since then, he has devoted his life to training and racing.

“Working with Corie over the past six months has been humbling,” said Corie’s mentor Bert Appleton. “Having worked with able-bodied elite athletes, my talks with him about preparation, performance and development are very much the same. I find that the only person who refers to restrictions, limits and disability is me.”

Corie will typically spend 12 hours every week in the gym, committing to a specific strength and conditioning programme. His nutrition, training and race planning, mental preparation and rest are all focused on getting him to the race start line in the best possible condition.

As well as World Cup bronze, Corie also finished fifth in this year’s European Championships and second in the Para Sport World Championships in Lake Placid at the end of March.

## NEW CARE FRAMEWORK FOR MOST SERIOUSLY WOUNDED

**A** new personalised care framework has been agreed between the MoD and NHS England for the UK’s most seriously wounded Armed Forces personnel.

IPC4V, or Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans, has been developed by the MoD, NHS England, service charities including Blesma, and local authorities, as well as patients and their families. It will benefit a small number of Armed Forces personnel who have

complex and enduring physical, neurological, and mental health conditions resulting from injury attributable to Service and who require 24-hour, one-to-one care from a trained individual.

Available across England, IPC4V will provide a framework for planning and delivering this personalised care approximately nine months before recipients are due to leave the military.

A range of organisations including the MoD, Armed Forces charities, and health and

social care charities will work with the individuals to develop a personalised care and support plan that meets their health and wellbeing needs. It will also give individuals more choice and control over how their care is provided, and will include the involvement of the individual’s family/carer where appropriate.

The Ministry of Defence will also provide extra funding for those who meet the eligibility, including the need for 24-hour, one-to-one care.

The life-long funding, set at £24,000 per year, can be spent on a range of services; from personal care and housing adaptations, to health and wellbeing equipment, and therapies above those already provided by statutory services to enable a better quality of life.

Individuals who are eligible to get care and support under the IPC4V framework are identified by medical staff whilst they are on the Defence Recovery Pathway.

Ken (front row, far right)  
first tried archery in 2016



## Bull's-eye for Blesma archer selected for GB

**K**en Hargreaves, a former Army captain from Northumberland who was injured whilst serving in Iraq in 2003, was selected for the Archery GB Para team in late 2018 despite only discovering his talent for the sport in 2016.

“My wife and niece decided to take up the sport, and during a visit to the local archery shop I gave it a try,” said Ken, 57, from Elsdon. “I discovered that I was quite good at it! At the same time the Invictus Games were on TV, so I decided I would try and make the team the following year.”

Ken competed at the 2017 Invictus Games, where he came fourth in both the individual and team competitions. Following the Games, he funded his own accommodation and travel to all the rounds of the British National Outdoor Championships.

He finished 22nd out of 900 competitors in the national rankings at the end of the year, setting a new British Para record for Men's Open Recurve in the process.

“It has taken a lot of hard work and determination but somewhere along the way I impressed the right people,” said Ken. “Most people had never seen a man in a wheelchair with an assistance dog on the recurve line at a national event!”

Ken was hoping to compete at the Archery World Championships in June, but despite achieving the score needed to qualify, a torn tendon in his left arm kept him out of the event. He now has his sights firmly trained on the Outdoor National Disability championships in September, and the Forces National Indoor Championships later in the year.

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### RACE ACROSS AMERICA CALLS FOR MIND OVER MATTER

Mind Over Matter are about to become the first British all-female team of serving, wounded, injured and sick veterans to take on the notorious Race Across America.

As this issue of the magazine was going to press, the eight cyclists, including Blesma Members Nerys Pearce and Tara Robertson, were preparing to cycle 3,000 miles in shifts across America, from the west to the east coast. They will climb 170,000 feet, cross 12 states, and cycle across the Mojave Desert in 45°C heat.

“In the last month, we've been putting all the training together as a team. I'm starting to feel quite excited,” said Tara, who was partially blinded by an IRA bomb in 1996.



### EMAIL BUDDIES

Still not receiving email updates from the Association? You're missing out! If you don't have an email address but have someone who could accept them on your behalf, please ask them to email [memberadmin@blesma.org](mailto:memberadmin@blesma.org)

## SOLDIERING ON AWARDS 2019 SPLIT THE JUDGES

Two Blesma Members shared the Inspiration Award at the 2019 Soldiering On Awards after judges couldn't choose a clear winner.

Nathan Cumberland (pictured near right) and Luke Sinnott were announced as joint winners at an awards ceremony in London in April. The award recognises a person or group who have overcome significant challenges, injury or disability, and whose achievements are an inspiration to others.

“Winning the award was so unexpected. When they called my name, I was still sat down looking around to see who had won!” said Luke, who had been nominated by a childhood friend for his charity work and for his achievements in athletics post-injury.

In all, 27 Blesma Members were nominated for a Soldiering On Award. Congratulations to everyone who made the shortlist!



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# Awareness will aid assessment

Blesma's contribution to the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments' clinical conferences raises awareness of the challenges faced by amputees



In March, Blesma gave presentations to 1,200 healthcare professionals employed by MAXIMUS Centre for Health and Disability Assessments to highlight the challenges of living with limb loss.

MAXIMUS is contracted by the government to assess for Employment and Support Allowance and its equivalent within Universal Credit. The aim of the sessions, part of the company's annual clinical conferences, was to educate the company's assessors on living with limb loss so that they would have a better understanding of the challenges faced by amputees.

The conferences were held in Glasgow, Manchester, London, and Bristol. Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics) was the Blesma lead on the project and developed a bespoke package for the conferences that covered aspects such as how and why amputations occur, a brief history of prosthetic devices, and complications and challenges. A key part of the presentation was to 'myth bust' and show that, despite a number of advances in technology, using a prosthesis is, for most people, about enabling them to carry out aspects of daily living. Brian explained that not everyone with a prosthetic limb can wear it regularly, let alone be an elite athlete.

### EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND PASSION

The invitation to present at the conferences was the result of Blesma's Independence & Wellbeing Advisor Liz Watling being a member of the Customer Representative Group. The sessions were delivered by BSO North Steve Burton, BSO London & SE Paul Findlay, as well as BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier.

"Since Blesma joined our advisory Customer Representative Group, we've been impressed by the work it does to support veterans with amputation



**BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier presents at one of the CHDA's conferences**

or prostheses," said Paul McGaughey, CHDA's Clinical Director. "As experts in this field, we were keen to invite them to deliver a session at our clinical conferences.

"We're grateful to Steve, Paul and Brian for delivering four insightful sessions that explored how amputation can affect an individual's function. Their experience, knowledge and passion were greatly appreciated by all 1,200 of our healthcare professionals."

It is hoped that in future, when assessors encounter people living with limb loss, they will be conscious of the challenges that person might face and will be able to draw out further relevant information relating to any claim that person is making. Having this awareness should help to produce an accurate assessment report which will, in turn, be beneficial to the claimant.

A number of these sessions have now been booked with Capita as well as Veterans UK's medical advisors and overseas treatment team.

*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)*



**WE'VE BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE WORK BLESMA DOES TO SUPPORT VETERANS. AS EXPERTS, WE WERE KEEN TO INVITE THEM TO DELIVER A SESSION**





Peter and Nancy  
(both aged 97)  
on their wedding  
day in April

at first. We got chatting though and it was just like an electric shock!” she said.

Peter served in both the RAF and the Army during WWII. He was sent to France a week after the D-Day Landings, where he lost his right arm after being shot by a sniper. Nancy, who is also 97, joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. She commissioned as an officer in 1943, and was stationed on a gun site in Swansea for the remainder of the war before being discharged as a subaltern in 1948.

After their first meeting the pair kept in regular contact on the phone until Nancy got the news she had been waiting for and discovered that she would be moving to live at the Blind Veterans’ centre last October.

“It was the best news I could have received and we now live just four doors down from each other, so I can go and visit him whenever I wish,” she said. “Peter proposed to me in November. We both agreed that a blessing was more appropriate than a formal wedding.

It is a dream come true to know that I can feel loved by someone as wonderful as Peter after many years alone. It really has been a miracle – we love each other to bits.”

For Peter, it was humbling to discover he could love again and also that someone could love him. “Until I met Nancy, I hadn’t realised how lonely I’d really been since my wife died,” he said. “We just want to be happy together for a very long time.”



## D-Day veteran finds love at the age of 97

Two veterans have found love in their late nineties and have celebrated with a love blessing ceremony at Blind Veterans UK’s chapel in Brighton.

Blesma Member Peter Van Zeller became a resident at the charity’s training and rehabilitation centre last year and met Nancy Bowstead when she was there on holiday.

“This lady came and sat next to me in the lounge after dinner. She definitely had a spark and we hit it off immediately,” said Peter, who is 97 years old. Nancy, however, remembers the meeting a little differently: “I went over to speak to him as I am always fascinated in people who have interesting lives, and he was a little grumpy with me

## OWEN PICKS UP HAT-TRICK OF MEDALS AT SNOWBOARD CHAMPS

PARALYMPIC SNOWBOARDER OWEN PICK WAS back on the slopes in March and April, competing for the first time since last year’s Winter Paralympic Games in South Korea. Owen won two bronze medals in Boardercross at the Para Snowboard World Cup and picked up a silver in Banked Slalom at the World Para Snowboard Championships.

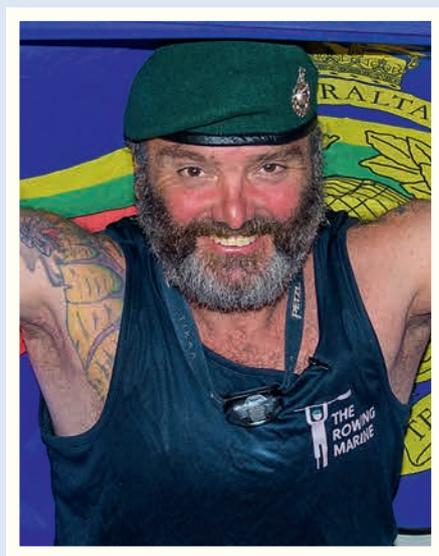
“This season was my best so far,” said Owen. “It felt like a very different season from last year because I had a new coach. We changed my training and I felt a lot more chilled out going into competitions – there was nothing like the pressure I felt at the Paralympics.”

Owen will spend the summer relaxing and working before returning for another season of racing, which will begin later in the year.



In the spotlight

# Lee Spencer



**R**oyal Marine Lee Spencer had never rowed prior to 2014. So it may come as a surprise to discover that, just five years after he lost a leg in a roadside accident, he has completed a solo row across the Atlantic Ocean, breaking three world records in the process. It may come as even more of a surprise to learn that this wasn't his first experience of rowing the Atlantic!

"I rowed the Atlantic Ocean with three other Blesma Members in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge in 2016. Cayle Royce, Nigel Rogoff, Paddy Gallagher and myself crewed the Row2Recovery boat and became the first British all-amputee crew to row across the Atlantic. That experience changed my life in such a positive way. I thought I'd lost the person I was when I lost my leg because I defined myself by my physicality. To suddenly be disabled was a negative change in my life – or so I thought! But rowing 3,000 miles across the Atlantic made me realise I was still the same person," says Lee.

## MAKING A MASSIVE STATEMENT

It is five years since Lee, who was then serving in the Royal Marines, was injured when he stopped at the scene of an accident on the M3 to lend a hand.

"I grew up during the Falklands War and saw how the Royal Marines played their part. I wanted to be a Marine from that moment, and I joined in March 1992. I completed three tours of Afghanistan and one of Iraq. I loved my service and felt as though I had found my place in life.

"But in 2014 that came to an end. I stopped to help people who had been involved in an accident and was hit by flying debris. A passer-by put a tourniquet on my leg and another stood on my groin to stem the blood. I spent six weeks in hospital and then went to Headley Court for my rehabilitation. At the end of that year, I saw an email from Blesma asking for volunteers to row the Atlantic.

"Taking part in that row inspired me to take on the solo challenge. It made me start to think about how disabled people are viewed and how they tend to be defined by their disability. I decided that

breaking a physically demanding able-bodied record such as an ocean row would make a massive statement that no one should be defined by their disability.

"I had planned to start the row in January 2018, but my mum sadly passed away so I decided to delay the challenge for a year. When the time came to set off I remember being in Gibraltar just looking at the sea for days waiting for a weather window that never seemed as though it would come. I felt under more pressure with each delay as I thought people would doubt whether I was ever going to do it. Eventually, I saw a chance in Portugal, and I set off on 09 January.

## WEATHER WINDOWS AND WORLD RECORDS

"Everything went perfectly for five days and then my navigation system packed up. I had to stop in the Canary Islands for repairs, which took two days, followed by three waiting for another weather window. I was itching to get away as a Dutch rower was trying to break the record, too. Once my opportunity came, I rowed as hard and as fast as I could.

"I hit the wall two and half weeks from the end – I can't put into words how difficult it was. Carrying on the daily grind of rowing two hours on and one hour off was intense, and the weather was horrific. I experienced waves of up to 50ft. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. Experiencing such bad weather on my own was the worst – I was petrified for three days straight!

"Eventually, I arrived in French Guiana in South America on 11 March. I had been at sea for 60 days, 16 hours and 6 minutes. I broke three world records: I became the first physically disabled person to row from mainland Europe to mainland South America; I completed the longest ocean row by a physically disabled person; and I beat the able-bodied record by 36 days. I knew I had a good chance of taking a few days off the record, but 36 days was beyond my wildest dreams.

"A couple of days later I got a surprise video call from Prince Harry, congratulating me on my row and on breaking the records. It's pretty cool when Prince Harry calls you 'mate' and 'a massive legend!'"

“

**IT MADE ME START TO THINK ABOUT HOW DISABLED PEOPLE ARE VIEWED, AND HOW THEY TEND TO BE DEFINED BY THEIR DISABILITY**

”

# On top of the world

Martin Hewitt scales Everest (p30)



Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photographs: Anthony Upton

## Activities 2019

# Get out and active in 2019

Blesma is offering its Members the chance to try more activities than ever before in 2019 – all for free! Here's what's coming up in the next few months. Don't miss out! Apply now by emailing Emily on [meo@blesma.org](mailto:meo@blesma.org) or by calling her on 020 8548 7094



### Horseback in America

**Location:** Arizona, USA

**Date:** 26 October - 03 November

**Application deadline:** 15 July

An action-packed week of horsemanship and general 'cowboy-ing it up'. Spend seven days in the Arizona Desert on a course designed to teach you all about life on a ranch and riding on the trails.

#### Who can take part?

This activity is not suitable for the majority of wheelchair users due to poor wheelchair access, deep sand and no wheelchair-accessible facilities. However, exceptions to this rule have been made in the past, so if you feel like you can cope in these circumstances, please apply and inform the Activities Team.

#### Requirements:

You must be able to enter the USA and

your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel.

### Bahamas Expedition

**Location:** Bahamas

**Date:** 27 October - 05 November

**Application deadline:** 15 July

An opportunity to spend a week doing some amazing water sports and activities, as well as exploring the island of Nassau.

**Who can take part?** Any Member.

#### Requirements:

Your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel.

### Fitness and Lifestyle Course

**Location:** Fuerteventura

**Date:** 17-22 November

**Application deadline:** 01 August

Members will get the chance to assess

everything from their fitness levels to their current lifestyle choices over a three-day period in the Canary Islands. Intensive physical training will be combined with expert advice on how to manage both your fitness and your diet.

**Who can take part?** Any Member looking for a change in their lifestyle.

### Colorado Ski Spectacular

**Location:** Colorado, USA

**Date:** 07-17 December

**Application deadline:** 01 August

This annual event, which is run by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectaculars for all manner of adaptive Winter sports. It offers the perfect opportunity to have fun on the slopes and enjoy all that the Ski Spectacular has to offer. Mono-ski, snowboarding,



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

stand-up skiing, and three-track disciplines will all be available.

**Who can take part?**

Most injury types can be catered for on the slopes. However, hotel rooms are not adapted and you must be able to use a bath.

**Requirements:**

You must be able to enter the USA and your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel.

## Christmas Markets Couples' Weekend

**Location:** Cologne, Germany

**Date:** 06-09 December (TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 September

This weekend break will offer the perfect chance to get into the Christmas spirit.

Enjoy some sightseeing in the historic German city of Cologne and experience its world-famous Christmas markets.

You'll even be able to visit Angel Market; the oldest Christmas market in Cologne.

This is the perfect chance to enjoy the Christmas festivities, spend time relaxing with your partner, and get to know other Blesma Members.

**Who can take part?** Anyone, but please be aware that the markets are busy and that the streets are cobbled in places.

**Requirements:**

Participants must have a valid passport.

Please also note that this activity is only open to couples.

## Winter Sports Europe 2020

**Location:** La Plagne, France

**Date:** 18-26 January 2020 (TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 October

A week-long trip of snow sports to suit everyone. Mono-ski, snowboarding, stand-up skiing, three-track, taxi ski, and ski bike are all available. This will be the fourth year of combining Blesma's ski bike event with its adapted Winter sports programme.

**Who can take part?**

Any Member. Please state which Winter sport you are most interested in taking part in when completing the application form.

**Requirements:**

Members must have a valid passport.

## Winter Sports Families

**Location:** La Plagne, France

**Date:** 15-23 February 2020

**Application deadline:** 15 October

The perfect chance to explore adaptive Winter sports with your family. Children can have first-class instruction while you explore the slopes with skilled instructors and guides.

**Who can take part?** Everyone, but please be aware that there are no babysitting facilities so your children must be of an age to ski.

**Requirements:**

All participants must have a valid passport.

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

## NEWS BRIEFS



### HIGH FIVE FOR BLESMA'S WHEELCHAIR RUGBY PLAYERS

Blesma Members have competed in their first Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby 5s Championship tournament as part of H4H Endeavour Wheelchair Rugby team.

The team, which includes Gordon Clark and Roch Rochester, and is coached by Paul Stocker, came sixth in the tournament at Stoke Mandeville Stadium in Aylesbury.

"It was hard work but a really good weekend," said Gordon, whose right leg was amputated below the knee following an injury during a training exercise in 1982.



### MICHAEL AIMING TO GO ONE BETTER AT THIS YEAR'S OPEN

Michael Browne is aiming for his best season yet as a professional golfer. He'll compete in more than 25 competitions, including his defence of the South African Disabled Open and the qualifier for The Open. "I've missed out on The Open by one shot for the last two years, so this year I'm determined to make it," he said.



## Remembrance Weekend

**Location:** The Cenotaph, London

**Date:** 09-10 November **Application deadline:** 15 July

The annual Blesma Remembrance Parade is commemorated at the Cenotaph in London over Remembrance Weekend.

**Who can take part?** Accommodation for the Remembrance Weekend will change this year to allow better hotel accessibility to all those who wish to attend. The new hotel, in Hayes, offers 43 wheelchair-accessible rooms combined with ADA wet rooms, as well as providing full accessibility throughout the hotel to cater for all Members.

## GOT A STORY? GET IN TOUCH!

Have you got a great story you'd like to tell? Want some help publicising an event or expedition you're planning? It's easy to put your story in the magazine – just get in touch at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



Newcastle's Discovery Museum will tell the story of the Association and its Members

## Museum set to host Blesma exhibition

The Discovery Museum in Newcastle is to hold an exhibition dedicated to Blesma. The exhibition, set to open in July, will explore the Association's formative years, chart its development to present day, and feature prosthetics, portraits and audio clips of Members living in the North East.

It is hoped the exhibition will educate visitors about Blesma and show the huge price members of the Armed Forces often pay for serving their country.

"The Discovery Museum regularly works alongside groups and organisations to hold exhibitions. The museum is also home to the Museum of the Light Dragoons so I try to engage and involve veterans in my work," said David Weatherstone, Assistant Outreach Officer at the museum, who has

organised the exhibition. "After meeting Pete Shields, BSO for the North East, I wanted to get Blesma on board because it sounded like a fantastic charity."

Afghanistan veterans Chris Parkes and Scott Cooper, civilian casualty Newton Shipley whose house was bombed in WWII, and 103-year-old WWII veteran Timothy Shea are just some of the people who will feature in the exhibition.

"Some talk about how they sustained their injuries, some about rehabilitation, whilst others speak about Blesma. The pieces of audio are brilliant," said David.

*For more information on the museum in general and the exhibition in particular, visit [www.discoverymuseum.org.uk](http://www.discoverymuseum.org.uk)*

## FORMER MARINE TO BE ADVANCED PARAMEDIC

A FORMER ROYAL MARINE WHO lost his right leg in a training accident is well on his way to becoming a qualified advanced paramedic.

Alan Le Sueur, 36, from Dorset, joined the Royal Marines in 2005 and completed tours of Iraq and Sierra Leone before becoming a medical assistant in 2009. His military career was cut short when he injured his ankle during training. He had a number of operations over the following four years in an attempt to save his leg, during which time he was given the opportunity to train as a paramedic.

But just as Alan was about to start on his new life as a paramedic, he made the



decision to amputate his leg, which seemed to put an end to his career plans.

"After all the training and effort I had put in to become a paramedic, it was disheartening to try to get employment in the service as an amputee," Alan said. "It almost reached a point where I took myself off the paramedic register because my skills were fading away."

Then, in 2017, Alan secured a part-time position as a triage paramedic in the Urgent Treatment Centre at Weymouth Community Hospital. His boss recognised his potential and sent him on advanced courses for specialist paramedics, and Alan has since been accepted to study an MSc in Advanced Clinical Practice while he continues to work.

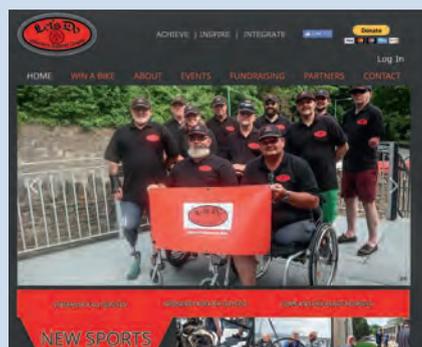
The course will take Alan three years to complete, after which he believes he could well become the country's first disabled advanced paramedic. "The qualification will be another step on the way to becoming a fully-fledged specialist paramedic," said Alan. "Graduating will be amazing! My hope after that is to work within a GP's practice as an advanced paramedic."

## LET'S DO DOES FISHING FOR VETERANS

Member Robert Maxwell, who lost his right arm in a road accident in 2004, has opened a fishing retreat for disabled veterans in Northern Ireland.

"We attracted funding to build a car park, create fishing stands, stock the lake with fish, and install an eco-toilet with disabled access," said Robert, who is the founder of the charity Let's Do Veterans Support.

Robert soon hopes to provide fishing workshops at the retreat, which is based at Kennedy's Lake near Clough.



Jaco (left) and Stu became the first all-amputee team to complete the Cape Epic



# An epic first for mountain bikers

Jaco Van Gass and Stu Croxford have become the first all-amputee team to complete the Absa Cape Epic, a gruelling eight-day 630-kilometre cycle challenge in Western Cape, South Africa.

The challenge, held in March, went from the University of Cape Town to the finishing line at Val de Vie Estate, and took in rugged mountain trails, bone-jarring tracks, and windswept gravel roads.

“Growing up in South Africa, I knew about the race and the reputation it had as being one of the toughest mountain bike races in the world,” said Jaco, who lost his left arm at the elbow whilst serving in Afghanistan. “I’ve been obsessed with

the idea of taking part for years and when I did some digging, I discovered that no all-amputee team had ever completed the race. I thought; why not complete a Cape Epic first?”

So last August, Jaco enlisted the help of fellow amputee Stu Croxford after witnessing his mental strength and physical ability during the 2017 Race Across America. The pair gave themselves the name Team KT18 after the area code of the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, and set about learning how to properly ride mountain bikes in tough conditions.

“Early on in the event, I couldn’t believe I had agreed to take part as I felt massively

inexperienced and didn’t know what to expect, so getting to the end was a huge achievement,” said Stu, who had his right leg amputated following injuries sustained on operations in Afghanistan.

“I couldn’t believe it when we finished. We had some amazing support from the event’s volunteers and other riders on the course – some competitors even told us we had motivated them to finish when they had been having a tough day. The whole event was a great experience!”

The cycling duo are now planning to enter the Swiss Epic as well as The Pioneer in New Zealand to become the first all-amputee team to complete The Epic Series.

## Wheelchair rugby league gets boost with formation of all-new Army team

SOLDIERS AND VETERANS WHO WERE injured during their service have joined forces to form a new Army wheelchair rugby league team.

“The idea to form an Army team grew out of a conversation I had with Sean Fanning who, like me, is an ex-Army rugby player,” said Blesma Member Steven Sampher, who is a volunteer for Soldiers League Charity and has played an instrumental role in getting the new team together.

“Soldiers League Charity was originally set up to fund soldiers who were injured playing rugby league,” said Steven. “In 2018, we started taking wounded, injured and sick soldiers to rugby games to get them socialising again. We have now



**Crunch time: the all-new Army team**

taken that one step further and created a wheelchair rugby league side.”

Players from Soldiers Wheelchair League and Hull Wheelchair RL have united to form the brand-new team, which held its first training session in February. Blesma Members Simon Brown and Louis Farrell

attended the session, whilst fellow Member and England international James Simpson went along to offer coaching support.

“The first session was groundbreaking and something I’ve wanted to see happen for years; a bunch of wounded soldiers coming together again to play rugby league,” said James, who plays for Leeds Rhinos Wheelchair Rugby League team and is an ambassador for the Rugby League World Cup 2021. “The passion of everyone involved was incredible and all the players threw everything into it. I’m glad I could help out with some coaching.”

It is hoped that there will soon be RAF and Navy teams, and players will then be scouted to represent their countries at the 2021 Rugby League Wheelchair World Cup, which will be hosted in England with matches being held alongside the Rugby League World Cup.



Words: Jessica Mackinnon

# Buckets, bikes and bake sales... it's Blesma Week!

**T**hey climbed, they rowed, they baked cakes... no event was too big or small as Members, fundraisers, supporters and volunteers up and down the country came out to support our wounded veterans during Blesma Week.

From the crowded Underground stations of London in rush hour to supermarket checkouts in Newtownards in Northern Ireland, the Association's annual week of fundraising and awareness raising sparked a wide range of exciting events – from cycling and rowing to baking cakes and even a Member-organised family fun day.

The week, which this year took place from 20 to 26 May, saw Blesma Members, fundraisers and staff join forces to mark the sixth consecutive year of Blesma Week. The week got underway with the Blesma Fundraising Team joining Member Nick Eley at the Mercury Mall in Romford to sell Blesma raffle tickets, with the help of a little shout out or two from Time Radio! Here's what else happened during Blesma Week.

## TFL COLLECTIONS

Thanks to an incredible level of support from Transport for London once again this year, the Fundraising Team were able to decorate Canary Wharf and Liverpool Street Underground stations with Blesma buckets, banners, and balloons. The army of bucketeers who came out in force to cajole commuters helped raise more than £6,550.

## BLESMA NORTHERN IRELAND

Members in Northern Ireland came out in good numbers during Blesma Week to take part in a range of events. Amputees William Curran and Graham Kelly took on the Boots on for Blesma Virtual 10k challenge. William chose to complete a 10k row while Graham clocked up his miles on a hand bike. The following day,



**Top: Colin Shields spreads the word in Northern Ireland while (left) fearless fundraisers decided to scale the O2**



From cake sales in the Midlands (above) to Boots on for Blesma challenges (left) all sorts of activities took place during Blesma Week



Northern Ireland Outreach Officer Fiona Morrison was joined by several Members and their families at Tesco Extra Newtownards. Colin Shields, Mark Rogerson, Jean McCready, Bryan Phillips and Michael O'Brien collected an incredible £941.73 from generous Tesco shoppers.

Later in the week Fiona joined Jean McCready, a Blesma Widow, for a car boot sale at Seagoe Church of Ireland in Portadown. The pouring rain didn't dampen their spirits as the duo raised £80 in just two hours!

### BLESMA MIDLANDS BAKE SALE

On Wednesday 22 May, Midlands Outreach Officer Vanessa Lucas attended the Birmingham Hippodrome with Members Sean Povey, Graham Harvey and Jeff Price to watch the premier of the play *10 Soldiers* by the Rosie Kay Dance Company. The group were able to hold a bucket collection after the show and raised £836.86.

The next day, Vanessa swapped premieres for cake stands as she joined up with Sean Povey, Jan McLelland and Rob Dalton to sell muffins and cakes to staff at MoD Stafford (pictured top right). A big thank you to the Station Commander at Beacon Barracks for allowing the team on site!

### UP THE O2

On Saturday 25 May, 13 fearless fundraisers, including Blesma Members Wendy Baker and Martin Burns, scaled the O2. During the climb Rob Holland and Cathy Thompson were given The Cyril Stephens Award in recognition of all the fundraising they have done to support Blesma over the last five years.



### FAMILY FUN DAY

Last but by no means least, Member Paul Swain hosted a charity family fun day at The Pumping Station in Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire on Sunday 26 May. There was plenty to entertain both adults and kids, including live music, outdoor games such as extreme Nerf combat and bouncy castles, as well as food, face painting and much more. Thanks to everyone's generosity, the event raised £2,400.



# OBITUARIES

## Those we have lost

### Peter Crotty

15 February 1925 - 02 June 2019

PETER CROTTY JOINED THE ROYAL Artillery as a Gunner in June 1945 at the age of 18. He was injured by a terrorist bomb in 1947 whilst serving in Palestine which cost him his right arm below the elbow. Peter was medically discharged in August 1947 and sent to Roehampton to learn how to use an artificial arm and its various attachments.

“I was fitted with a number of prostheses that could do different things – I had one for holding my camera and a hook for lifting. It felt good to be with other amputees,” he recalled in a 2018 interview with *Blesma Magazine*.

Peter studied for a degree and then worked for the Civil Aviation Authority as a radio engineer for 30 years. He didn't let his injury hold him back. He got married and had two sons, he enjoyed sailing into his eighties and would often take limbless ex-Service men sailing on his yacht.

Laterly, he enjoyed crown green bowls. He called it the perfect one-handed sport, and said it kept him occupied mentally and physically.



Peter was an active Member of Blesma from the very early days of his injury. During one Seniors' Week at the Crieff Home some 20 years ago he met Betty, who was attending a Widows' Week there. They started chatting, soon began courting and, a year later, were married. Peter moved from Cornwall to live with her in Ramsgate, where they had 20 wonderful years together. “Devastatingly, she passed away just three months ago,” Peter told *Blesma Magazine* last August. “She was the love of my life.”

### Kenneth Grant

10 June 1944 - 05 April 2019

BLESMA MEMBER KENNETH GRANT has passed away at the age of 74 following illness. Kenny was born in Lochee, Dundee and joined The Black Watch aged 16. In 1970, as a Lance Corporal, he was selected to run at the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. He was the marathon champion for his regiment, and finished in the top half, ahead of the then-world champion.

In 1982, Kenny was discharged from service and returned to Dundee, where he owned a shop for almost two decades. In April 2015, his right leg was amputated below the knee as a result of vascular disease. Kenny remained involved with The Black Watch Association and regularly raised funds for Blesma. He enjoyed Blesma



activities such as Soldier Ride New York (left) and the Activities Week. Kenny is survived by three sons; Kenneth, Steven and Christopher, and seven grandchildren.

### Those who have passed away

February - May 2019. May they rest in peace.

<b>Barnett T</b>	RAF	HQ	05/04/2019
<b>Brown W</b>	REME	HQ	08/04/2019
<b>Cook T</b>	RE	HQ	22/04/2019
<b>Ellis L</b>	RASC	HQ (Lincoln & Grimsby)	24/04/2019
<b>Graham C</b>	Dorset	HQ (Coventry)	10/02/2019
<b>Grant K</b>	Black Watch	HQ	05/04/2019
<b>Hambidge J</b>	Parachute Regiment	HQ	05/03/2019
<b>Hikin R</b>	Parachute Regiment	HQ	25/04/2019
<b>Holmes J</b>	RAOC	HQ	19/02/2019
<b>Jolliffe W</b>	RE	HQ	11/03/2019
<b>Jupp R</b>	RAF	HQ	07/03/2019
<b>Jury B</b>	RAF	HQ	04/05/2019
<b>King C</b>	Royal Anglian	HQ	07/02/2019
<b>Latham C</b>	Queens Royal Lancers	HQ (Richmond/IOW)	08/05/2019
<b>McGill D</b>	RN	Walsall	19/02/2019
<b>Paul A</b>	Royal Corps of Signals	HQ	09/02/2019
<b>Price J</b>	RA	HQ	18/04/2019
<b>Price S</b>	The Life Guards	HQ	02/02/2019
<b>Robinson M</b>	ACC/Royal Signals	HQ	02/03/2019
<b>Salt C</b>	RAF	HQ	21/03/2019
<b>Saul G</b>	RN	Portsmouth	April 2019

## NEWS BRIEFS

### BILL RECOGNISED FOR HIS WORK WITH BLESMA MEMBERS

Major (Retired) Bill Gillett, a BSO for 16 years after leaving the military, has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for his service to Blesma and its Members. Bill now works at the war injuries clinic at Salisbury District Hospital.



### BLESMA TRIO ARE PREPARING TO SCALE MONT BLANC

Three injured veterans, each of whom lost both their legs serving in Afghanistan, are preparing to scale Mont Blanc to raise funds for Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Blesma Members Stephen Handley, Scott Meenagh and Justin Davis all met at Headley Court and have teamed up to tackle the 4810-metre peak.

"We need to prepare our stumps for long periods of walking, and try to work out if we will get any sores," said Scott.

The trio, all members of the Casevac Club, which was formed in 2016 to reunite those wounded on Ops Herrick and Telic, are planning the attempt for August.

Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photograph: David Stevenson



## Team GB bring Simpson Cup back home at last

**T**eam GB's golfers have wrestled the Simpson Cup from the Americans for the first time since 2015. The Brits, including three Blesma Members, defeated Team USA on the Old Course at St Andrews in May by an impressive score of 11.5 to 7.5.

The Ryder Cup-style event pits 13 injured Service men and veterans from the USA against those from the UK every year. In the early stages of this year's tournament it looked as though the Cup was heading back to the States once again. But Team GB rode the storm early on and were able to secure a one point advantage going into the final day, before extending their lead in the singles matches.

"It was a fantastic tournament. To play at the home of golf and to win the cup back meant absolutely everything to me," said Member David Ward, who has played in every tournament since the inaugural one in 2012. This year, he was joined by fellow Blesma Members Greig Phillips and Team GB's captain Ian Bishop. "To play on those lovely courses at St Andrews was fantastic."

This year's victory ties the overall series, with both teams now having won the Cup four times. Greig has been announced as GB's captain for next year's competition.

*For more on the Simpson Cup, and this year's event, visit [www.simpsoncup.com](http://www.simpsoncup.com)*

## ICELAND IS A SNAPPER'S PARADISE

Nine photographers travelled to Iceland in May for what is quickly becoming the highlight of Blesma's photography calendar. The group was spoiled with opportunities to photograph waterfalls, glaciers, rapids, exploding geysers, awesome volcanic landscapes, and beautiful steaming blue volcanic waters.

*Read the full report and see more stunning images like this one taken by Andrew Haugen in the Summer issue of the Bulletin, out late July*



Photograph: Andrew Haugen

D-DAY: 75th ANNIVERSARY

# D-DAY IN THE WORDS OF BLESMA MEMBERS

ON OR SOON AFTER 06 JUNE 1944, A NUMBER OF BLESMA MEMBERS LANDED ON THE BEACHES OF NORMANDY. TWO OF THOSE WHO SURVIVED RECALL THEIR EXPERIENCES

**M**onths of meticulous clandestine planning and calculated misdirection took place before the first of 156,000 Allied troops landed on the Normandy Beaches at dawn on Tuesday, 06 June 1944 for an assault that would signal the beginning of the end of World War II.

It was the largest seaborne invasion in military history as an armada of more than 7,000 vessels crossed The Channel with precision timing as 15,766 Allied aircraft flew sorties above them. Those ships carried 156,115 troops into battle as the Allies prepared to challenge the Nazis' iron grip on Europe with an audacious assault along part of the Normandy coastline.

This year's 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings had a critical poignancy as it will likely be the last significant landmark for surviving veterans of Operation Overlord, an attack that involved troops from 13 nations sweeping in across five beaches over 50 miles of coastline to secure a beachhead in Normandy.

On the first day alone, at least 2,500 Allied troops were killed and 7,500 injured. By the end of the month, 875,000 troops had used the secured beaches to join the fight for Europe as the Allies forced the Germans to retreat.

The strategy for Operation Overlord had taken longer than a year of planning, with then Prime Minister Winston Churchill reporting the invasion to the House of Commons as 'undoubtedly the most complicated and difficult that has ever occurred'. It exposed Hitler's forces to fighting on two fronts, with the Allies advancing from the east and the west, and up through Italy.



British Commandos  
of 1st Special Service  
Brigade land on Sword  
Beach on the morning  
of 06 June 1944





Above: Royal Marines Commandos make their way onto Juno Beach on the morning of 06 June 1944

**“I CRAWLED AWAY TO SEE THAT MY RIGHT LEG WAS COMPLETELY SMASHED AND THE FRONT OF MY LEFT LEG HAD DISAPPEARED. THERE WAS JUST A BIT OF THE HEEL LEFT”**

Many Blesma Members were involved in D-Day and the subsequent actions during the Battle for Normandy, which would account for some 425,000 Allied and German troops killed, wounded or missing. Many lost limbs just as they were entering the prime of life.

In the months before the invasion began, troops trained in the UK for the beach landings, with soldiers like Roy Hayward (right) steeling themselves for the months of conflict that were sure to follow. Every one of them was prepared to do their duty to liberate Europe. Every one of them was prepared to make a sacrifice for the freedoms that we now take for granted.

### SELFLESS BRAVERY AND MODESTY

D-Day was the start of the campaign that led to Germany’s eventual surrender on 07 May 1945. It took masterful planning, skilful execution and, above all, selfless bravery; prime characteristics of the British Armed Forces.

Yet modesty is still the trademark response from the operation’s dwindling band of survivors. They fought for their families, their friends, and their country, and then returned to work for the rest of their lives. Concerns about comrades lost and injured quelled any triumphalism.

In the days leading up to the 75th anniversary of D-Day, *Blesma Magazine* caught up with two Members who took part in the Normandy campaign. Like most veterans, they slipped back into civilian life, wrestled with poor levels of official support, and managed their injuries with a stoicism only matched by their modesty...

## Roy’s Story

*Roy Hayward (right) landed in Normandy on the evening of D-Day as a 19-year-old soldier with the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry*

**R**oy Hayward’s regiment saw almost constant action from the moment the tracks of its Sherman tanks churned through the sand of the French beaches and rumbled on into the French countryside.

Roy, who had left his job as a bank cashier to enlist, was a reserve tank crewman but soon got his chance as the unit took untold casualties as it spearheaded advances for Infantry battalions.

“I remember an Infantry sergeant saying they were being held up and could we help them,” recalls 94-year-old Roy, originally from Surrey, who now lives on the Isle of Wight. “He came on board our tank but we were hit as we moved up a lane. There was a thud but nothing else. Seconds later, a second shell penetrated the tank and exploded close to my legs.

“The tank immediately started to burn and everybody got out except for the sergeant. It was his first time in a tank, so I had to push him out. Another minute and I think I would have had it, but I somehow got him up and out of the hatch, and dropped down onto the lane after him. I crawled away and then turned over to see that my right leg was completely smashed and the front of my left leg had disappeared. There was just a bit of the heel left, and I think that



Roy, now 94, lost both his legs when his tank was shelled just a few days after D-Day

Watch Roy talk  
about his D-Day  
experiences at  
[www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate, Imperial War Museum

Above: Roy was awarded the Legion d'Honneur for bravery, and now enjoys tending to his garden

is what enabled me to stand and get out of the tank. I had burns to my right hand and forehead that hurt more than my legs. It was pretty bad and at one stage I thought: 'I have a revolver; is this the time to use it?' Fortunately I didn't, and anyway, my right hand was so burnt that I would have had difficulty operating the revolver."

Roy was rescued by two medics and taken to a field hospital in Fontenay, where his legs were amputated below the knee before he was taken back to England for hospital treatment just two months after his 19th birthday. His D-Day campaign had ended after 19 days.

### ACCEPTING A NEW DIRECTION

Roy was contacted by Blesma the moment he got home and started to get used to his 'new legs' that were made from metal and attached by a leather harness around his shoulders.

There was little time to mope about his 'bad luck' and, by April 1945, he was back at work, cycling to Hampton Court station, commuting to London Waterloo and then walking across the bridge to the Covent Garden branch of the Westminster Bank.

He married Barbara in 1948 and the couple lived in Surrey before taking early retirement in 1974 and moving to the Isle of Wight.

"At 19, you don't think so much about what your life is going to be like, you just accept the challenge," he says. "My father was a placid character – nothing ever upset him – so I'm sure I inherited his gene of accepting things.

"I didn't dwell on losing my legs. I viewed it as a challenge and, at the age of 94, I now look back on a very happy and full life. I've always had the feeling that Blesma was behind me and would see that I got what I was entitled

to, fighting for things I might not have been able to get myself. I didn't need too much to start with, but it was good to know the Association was in my corner. It gave me a feeling of confidence.

"I appreciate the work Blesma has done to secure our better pensions and get our War Widows Pension free of tax. The Association has been instrumental in obtaining all those benefits which ensure Members can live independently for as long as possible."

### LOOKING BACK ON A GOOD LIFE

Today, Roy's humour and modesty shine through. He is happy to tell stories about his foot falling off in front of startled commuters at Waterloo Station ("I thought it was amusing and just picked it up and carried on, but a woman behind me was completely shocked!") but he is more reluctant to talk about his *Légion D'Honneur*, the exalted French decoration for bravery.

The former Blesma Branch Chairman keeps two model tanks – a Sherman and a German Tiger – on either side of the TV in his lounge, and memories of D-Day and the events that changed his life are never far from his thoughts.

"It is important to remember D-Day because this will be the last big anniversary for us; there can't be many veterans left – most of us will now be in our late 90s, so I think I must be one of the youngest," he says. "I didn't know the importance of D-Day at the time, and didn't think of being involved as a sacrifice. My injuries were just a bit of bad luck and, although I wish I could have contributed more and been involved longer with my regiment, I might not have come back at all.

"I appreciate that I survived the events of WWII and have had a good life, and I will always look at events that way."



**“I DIDN'T KNOW THE  
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INJURIES WERE JUST  
A BIT OF BAD LUCK”**





## Ken's story

*This year marks the 75th anniversary of Ken Foster losing a leg to artillery fire – and of his marriage to Vera!*

“When I got wounded, I was much more worried about losing Vera than losing my leg,” says Ken Foster, a 97 year old from Sheffield. Ken was initially turned down when he tried to enlist, as his steel mill job in Sheffield was regarded as vital to the war effort. He was forced to ditch the job and work as a labourer for 12 months before being accepted into the Highland Light Infantry, and later joined the West Yorkshire Regiment for D-Day.

“We knew nothing about what was happening or the scale of it until we got there. It was kept very secret,” he says. “I landed a couple of days after D-Day so didn't have much problem on the beaches. I joined a reserve camp near Bayeux and we were soon fed into other regiments to make up for their losses.

“I was taking instructions from a tank driver when we were hit by a German anti-tank gun. I was unlucky. I saw my boot go up in the air with the sock still in it, and when I looked down my foot was hanging on by bits of skin. It felt as though I had just put my leg in a bucket of boiling water!

“The first thing I was given at the first aid station was a pot of sweet tea! But at the field hospital they dressed my wound and then amputated my leg. The Padre asked if there was anyone I wanted him to write to and Vera was the only person. I was more worried about losing her than my leg!”

The couple were married at St Cecilia's Church in Sheffield on 30 December 1944.

“I got two letters from Ken's Padre telling me that Ken was worried I would pack up with him. Many injured men were getting letters from their wives or sweethearts giving them up because they were injured,” says Vera. “But as far as I was concerned it is the man himself who counts, it doesn't matter what he loses. He was the same lad, you know?”

When Vera travelled from her home in Newcastle to visit Ken for Christmas in 1944 she had no idea of Ken's plans to get married. “He had got a special licence and I played hell with him for that because I knew what people thought when you got a special licence – they thought you *HAD* to get married! But I knew we were going to wed at some point, so I agreed. After we got married I stayed in Newcastle, working as a nursery nurse, while Ken was in and out of hospital.”

Ken became a Blesma Member, but was soon the victim of a workplace prejudice that became common after the war when

his boss told him that colleagues were complaining that he was getting more money because of his 16 shillings (80 pence) a week war pension.

“He said he wanted to cut my wages by 16 shillings because of what some of the blokes were saying, but I told him it wasn't his money. I told him right there and then: ‘Give me my cards at the end of the week and I'll say goodbye to you?’

Ken got another labouring job before becoming a telephone engineer, and worked until he retired at the age of 60. The couple have three children; Zelda, 73, Maurice, 72 and 65-year-old Martin.

“We got married on a Saturday and I went back to Newcastle on the Monday while Ken went back to hospital,” says Vera. “We didn't have a honeymoon, but we're going to Eastbourne this year.

“Everyone says they don't know how I put up with him but it works both ways! We've had some tough times but you've got to pull together; no his and hers, it's all ours. You have to consider each other rather than thinking about yourself all the time.

“We can get a bit disheartened because we can't get out as much as we'd like to, but we've got plenty of things to look back on so we are thankful. We can't get far but we get through and we have each other, which is the main thing.”



**“THE PADRE ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYONE I WANTED HIM TO WRITE TO AND VERA WAS THE ONLY PERSON. I WAS MORE WORRIED ABOUT LOSING HER THAN MY LEG”**





# A PARA ON THE PINNACLE OF PLANET EARTH

MARTIN HEWITT LIVES BY THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT'S MOTTO 'READY FOR ANYTHING', SO HE WAS PREPARED FOR AVALANCHES, ICE STORMS, AND EVEREST'S DEATH ZONE. THE ONE THING HE HADN'T FACTORED IN WAS PEOPLE

It's a bit of an understatement to say that there are plenty of challenges to overcome when attempting to scale Mount Everest. There are potentially deadly avalanches. There are huge crevasses, hundreds of feet deep, where just one incorrectly placed foot can result in a fatal fall. There are the perils of acclimatisation in the 'death zone' above 8,000m. There are frostbite-inducing ice storms, and the fact that you need to have fitness and determination levels that are off the scale, plus an experienced, savvy guide.

But one very new and completely unexpected issue has been facing mountaineers attempting the mission in recent times: crowds. Thanks to a narrowing of the weather window in which it's feasible to get moving, and the gross over-issue of permits by the Nepalese government, huge queues have been forming on the peak that was, at one time, considered the last great unconquerable wilderness.

For Martin Hewitt, who lost the use of his right arm after being shot in Afghanistan, it meant yet another obstacle as he attempted to make it to the summit in

## ADAPTIVE GRAND SLAM

May. The former Parachute Regiment Captain came up with, and is now trying to complete, the Adaptive Grand Slam (AGS) – a take on the Explorers Grand Slam which involves scaling the highest peak on each of the seven continents, as well as walking unsupported to both the North and South Poles. He was foiled in his first attempt to summit Everest, in 2012, because of adverse weather conditions. This time, it looked as though overcrowding might scupper his chances.

“It would have been OK if everyone on the mountain could have moved up within a decent time frame, but there were a lot of people who couldn’t climb properly – some were even wearing crampons for the first time!” he explains. “They hadn’t done the technical or altitude training properly, so we were getting choke points where you couldn’t overtake, or you had to take risks to do it. Queues are not what you need at 7,500m!”

It was particularly bad for Martin because he suffers from altitude sickness. “You don’t know how your body is going to react when you get really high and, unfortunately for me, I’m constantly throwing up. You don’t want to hang around feeling like that for long.”

Martin, who had already trekked to the North Pole, and climbed Kilimanjaro (the highest point in Africa), Mount Aconcagua (South America), McKinley (North America) and Elbrus (Europe), had a tough decision to make: remain stuck behind the slow coaches on the safest route up the highest mountain on earth, or go “off the fixed lines”.

“We decided to back our skills as climbers and come off the ropes rather than risk running out of oxygen,” he says. “It meant my guide and I were only attached to each other, so we were both in trouble if one of us slipped. But it proved to be the right decision and, after overtaking more than 100 people, we made it.”

Once at the top, Martin unfurled the Blesma flag – the first time the charity’s banner has reached the planet’s apex – having completed a task that began eight years before, when he successfully navigated the first instalment of the AGS; an expedition to The North Pole with Prince Harry, back in 2011.

### SURREAL SIGHTS FROM THE SUMMIT

“Standing on top of Everest is awesome,” says Martin. “People talk about being able to see the curvature of the earth, and that’s not true, but you can definitely see a long way! And you’re so high, you notice the colour differences between the atmosphere and the stratosphere. We were above a cloud system on one side of the valley, but had crystal clear views on the other. It was stunning, just totally surreal. At the same time, you’re trying to suck in oxygen and stay alive!”

More climbers get into trouble on the descent than on the way up, and in the nine days prior to Martin’s ascent, 11 people had perished on Everest. But when he was safely back at base camp, Martin was able to call his wife Victoria, who was at home with their nine-month-old daughter Georgina, with the good news.

**Below: Martin (right) at Everest Base Camp with fellow Blesma Member Terry Byrne; and (right) on Everest and acclimatising beforehand on Pumori**





**“WE CAME OFF  
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WE WERE BOTH IN  
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## MARTIN'S ROCK SOLID SUPPORT

*Victoria Hewitt has supported her husband Martin every step of the way, but admits it's nerve-racking waiting for that all-important phone call at the end of an expedition*

How much of a worry is it, knowing Martin is in some of the most dangerous places on earth? There is definitely an element of worry. Martin and I got married four years ago, and our daughter Georgina is nine months old. Everyone was celebrating when they heard he'd made it to the summit of Everest, but I didn't celebrate until he was safely back at base camp. But I am extremely proud of him and what he's doing! What he has managed to achieve with the use of only one arm is absolutely amazing.

Do you hope he moves on to something more sedate after he has completed the Grand Slam? I'd never ask Martin to stop doing what he loves, and what he is trying to achieve is amazing. One thing that he's done that has made me very proud, and which he has also enjoyed a lot, is helping others by running expeditions for people to try out mountaineering and rafting. So I'd be much more comfortable if he did more of that. We want the AGS to inspire people. I'm very outdoorsy too, so I might get dragged up a few hills once the Adaptive Grand Slam has been a success!

**"I'D NEVER ASK MARTIN TO STOP DOING WHAT HE LOVES. AND WHAT HE HAS MANAGED TO ACHIEVE WITH THE USE OF ONLY ONE ARM IS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING"**

But the expedition wasn't a complete success. Martin's partner on the Grand Slam, fellow Blesma Member Terry Byrne, had been forced to make the agonising decision not to attempt Everest after sustaining an injury to his stump in the weeks leading up to the climb. Having completed all the elements of the AGS so far, Terry travelled to the Himalayas with Martin and was acclimatising well when he hurt himself on a training climb on a mountain just west of Everest.

"I was abseiling down a 200m pitch when my stump punched into the ice," he says. "I popped my knee and something came out – either bone or ligament. I had to keep going because it wasn't somewhere you could get a helicopter to, but by the time I got back to camp my leg had started to swell. I was in such severe pain that it was waking me up in the middle of the night, so I had to make the call to knock Everest on the head. I've not been able to use the leg for more than half an hour without very high pain levels since."

Terry is determined to come back stronger and, like Martin, make it to the top at his second attempt. "I was physically fit and mentally strong enough in the lead up to the mission. I'd trained for a year, but I couldn't risk losing my leg," he says. "I was gutted, but it has just made me even hungrier to go back and do it. It'll be a bugbear of mine until I do."

And while Martin was also "gutted" to lose Terry, he's also convinced that his good friend will eventually succeed. In the meantime, the duo are plotting their



**A narrowing of the weather window and the over-issue of climbing permits by the Nepalese government have resulted in long queues on Everest**



## ADAPTIVE GRAND SLAM

next steps – they will travel to the South Pole in 2020/21, summit Antarctica’s Mount Vinson, and tackle Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia. Success in those three expeditions will, for Martin, mean completing the overall challenge to become the first disabled person to accomplish the Explorers Grand Slam.

“The South Pole will be a challenge because of the way I want to do it – unsupported and unassisted from the continental edge,” says Martin. “It’s close to 1,000 miles, pulling 140-170kg each. Technically, we could do a much shorter route, but I want to do it properly.”

He admits Everest was “the big one” on his list, and that it is “a relief to have ticked it off.” But how on earth did he keep going when, at times, he was literally on his knees, being sick and feeling utterly drained?



“It was like selection for the Paras, the Marines, or the Special Forces – to get through it, you have to be in the right mindset,” says Martin. “All these processes look for mental and physical robustness that goes above and beyond. Physically, each of the selection tests might not be so hard on their own. But combined, they’re very tough.

“It’s similar in an expedition environment. It takes a sustained effort, and when I look at injured veterans doing this kind of thing, they excel. They tend to outperform able-bodied people, just like we did on Everest when we overtook all those other climbers. There was true determination.”

It’s what makes Martin a dedicated supporter (and Member) of Blesma and why, as part of the Adaptive Grand Slam, he now runs a number of challenges for disabled adventurers. “We mainly get out in the mountains to places like Gran Paradiso in Italy, but we’re also doing some rafting now, too. Blesma has supported us financially, and there is funding available for any Blesma Member who is interested in an introduction to mountaineering.”

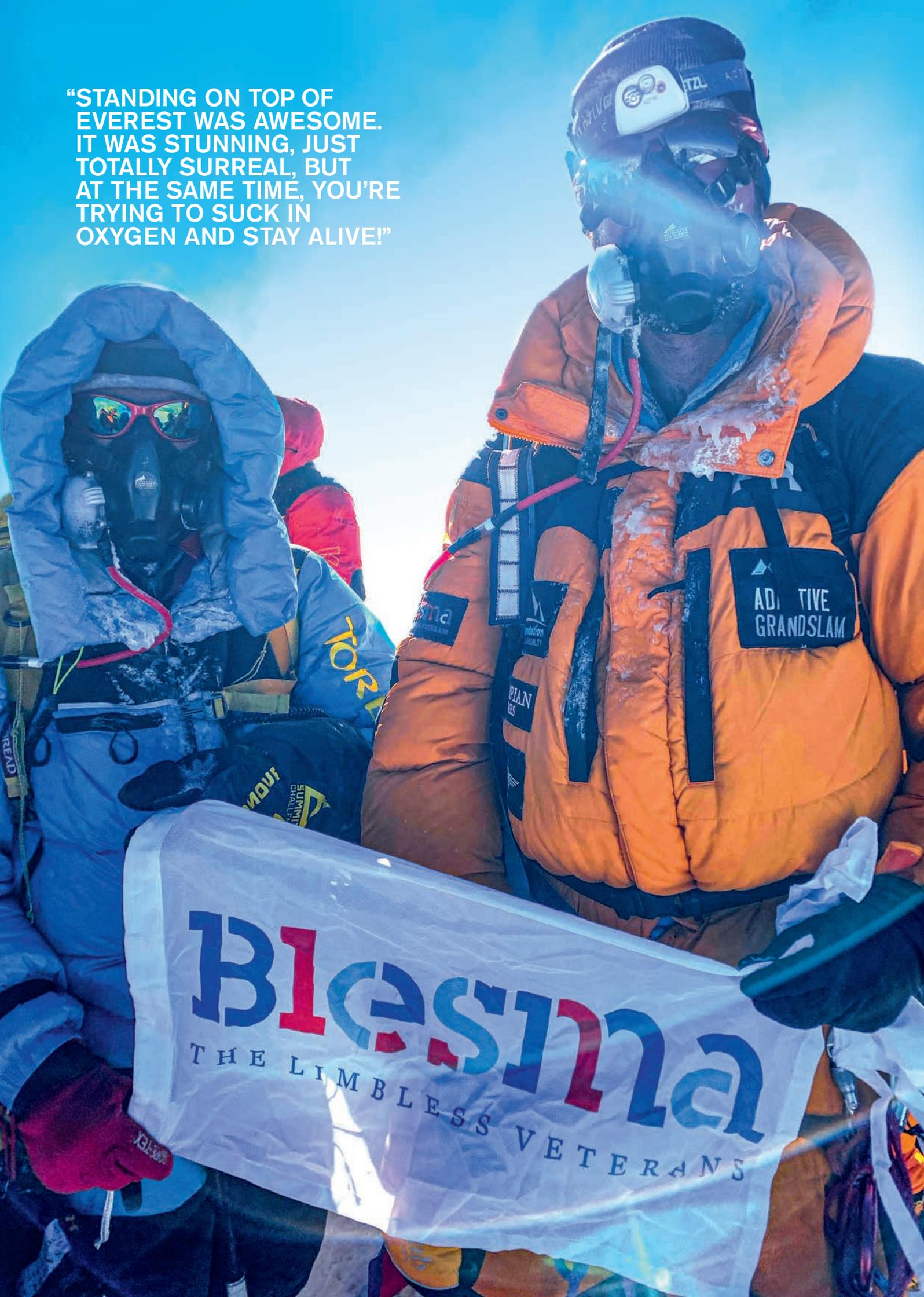
Many of those who do, he says, end up being bitten by the climbing bug. So why not give it a go? Who knows, you may end up standing on the top of the world one day, just like Martin.

*To find out more about the Adaptive Grand Slam visit [www.adaptivegrandslam.com](http://www.adaptivegrandslam.com)*

**Left and right: Martin achieved a lifetime goal, and took a big step towards completing the AGS, when he summited Everest**



“STANDING ON TOP OF  
EVEREST WAS AWESOME.  
IT WAS STUNNING, JUST  
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AT THE SAME TIME, YOU’RE  
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OXYGEN AND STAY ALIVE!”



## 1. GEOGRAPHIC NORTH POLE

Martin's first completed mission in April 2011. A 190-mile, 13-day slog with, and in aid of, Walking With The Wounded.



## 2. MOUNT MCKINLEY USA (6,194M)

The highest mountain in North America was conquered by Martin as part of a six-man team in May 2013. Each team member had to lug a 30lb rucksack and 200lb sled, battling wind speeds of up to 60mph.

ATLANTIC  
OCEAN

# MISSION POSSIBLE

*Seven continents, seven summits, two poles,  
one place in the record books. A step-by-step  
(by step!) guide to the planet's biggest challenge*

PACIFIC  
OCEAN

## 5. MOUNT ACONCAGUA SOUTH AMERICA (6,961M)

The team scaled the Argentine peak in January 2017, at the second attempt. With an atmosphere of only 40 per cent that at sea level, altitude sickness is a risk.



## 9. MOUNT VINSON, ANTARCTICA (4,892M)

The final piece of the jigsaw. After walking to the South Pole, Martin and co will tackle Antarctica's highest peak, situated one kilometre north of the South Pole. With an attempt billed for 2020/21, success would make Martin the first disabled man to complete the Explorers Grand Slam.



SOUTHERN  
OCEAN

### 3. MOUNT ELBRUS EUROPE (5,642M)

Located in Russia and summited by the team in June 2014. Some argue that Elbrus is actually in Asia, making Mont Blanc Europe's highest mountain – so the team have climbed that, too!



### 6. MOUNT EVEREST, ASIA (8,848M)

The big one. The team's first attempt was abandoned in 2012 due to serious threats from avalanches. Martin was successful on his second attempt, reaching the highest point on the entire planet early in the morning on Thursday 23 May 2019.



### 4. MOUNT KILIMANJARO AFRICA (5,895M)

The top of Africa. Located in Tanzania, Kili's 5,895m peak was reached after nine days of climbing in November 2014.



### 7. CARSTENSZ PYRAMID, AUSTRALIA (4,884M)

Also known as Puncak Jaya. It's a five-day hike through the jungle just to reach base camp. Temperatures average 0.5°C, the peak is 4,884m high, and the climb is extremely technical. The team will attempt it in 2020/21.

INDIAN  
OCEAN

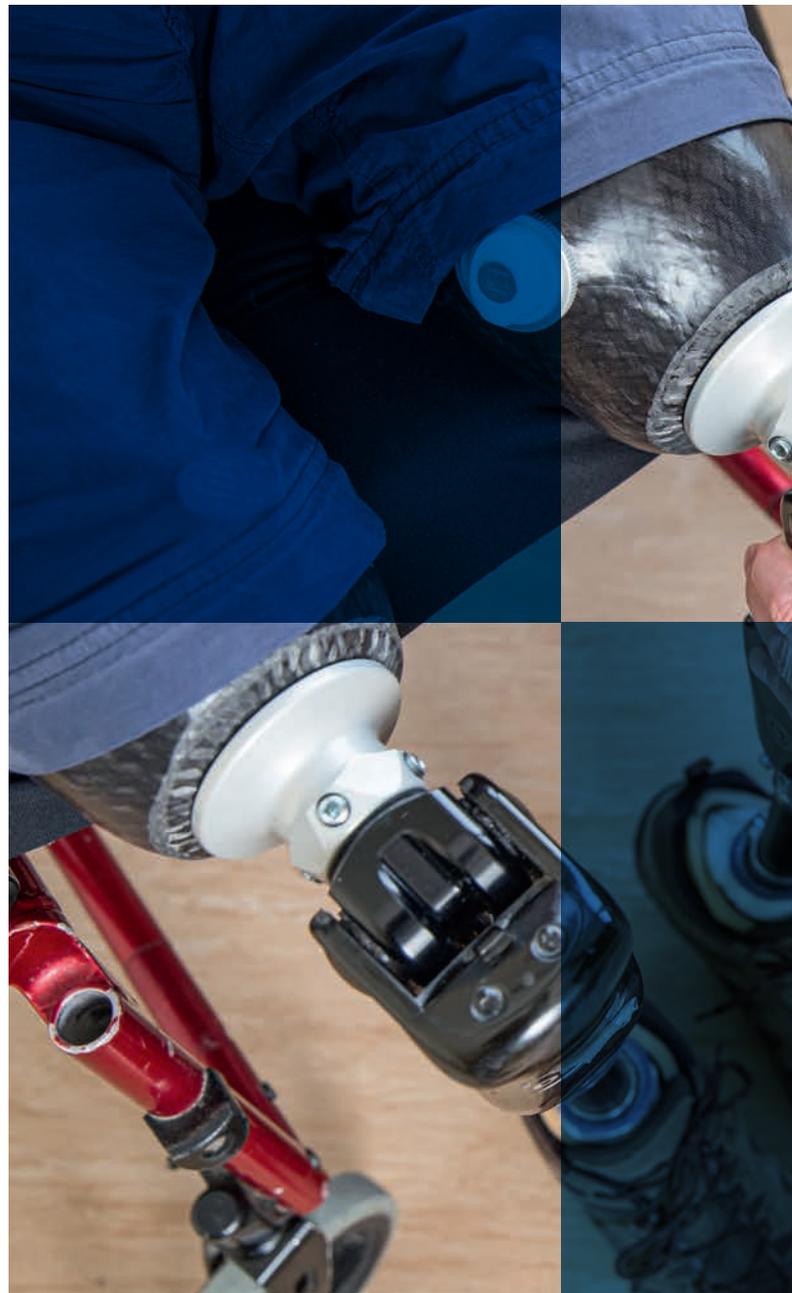
### 8. THE GEOGRAPHIC SOUTH POLE

From March to September, the South Pole gets no sunlight. The team will make their attempt in 2020/21, in the summer, when the sun will be continuously (but only just) above the horizon. The South Pole's climate is one of the coldest on Earth. The team will face a true test of endurance, crossing long paths across the barren, icy plateau during the 1,000-mile trek.



# COULD YOU BENEFIT FROM THE VPP?

THE VETERANS' PROSTHETICS PANEL WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2012 TO SUPPORT MILITARY AMPUTEES. FOR MANY BLESMA MEMBERS IT HAS BEEN LIFE CHANGING



It starts with a mundane six-page application form but it can lead to a life-changing intervention. The Veterans' Prosthetics Panel (VPP) funding process may seem daunting at first but it has become a swift and effective route to critical support. In a little more than seven years, the Panel has received 1,950 applications, and helped almost 500 Blesma Members with grants totalling almost £12 million. The funding has paid for everything from socket liners to the latest microprocessor knees that retail at more than £100,000 a pair.

Each of those successful applications, which have been awarded to veterans ranging in age from 25 to 93, has made a huge difference to a Member's quality of life and independence.

"There can be a feeling that the VPP is a bureaucratic process that is difficult to navigate but it really isn't," says Brian Chenier, Blesma's Prosthetics Support Officer, who sits on the panel in an advisory

capacity. "It is remarkably efficient and once an application has been submitted, the turnaround time is very quick, with veterans being notified within 48 hours.

"And the difference these awards can make is massive. We were able to help one Member put in a strong application for a waterproof knee, for example. He would go fishing to deal with his demons and everything else he was facing, and would get upset that he couldn't play with his kids in the river like other guys were doing because he didn't feel safe taking them in.

"He got the waterproof knee and went on a Blesma glamping trip, and there he was in the water with his two boys. He had a big smile on his face and said afterwards that it was the first time he'd felt like a dad since his amputation. What a difference that has made to his life!

"Others have been able to get a new job or take part in sports. Some of the changes are subtle and help people get on with the everyday things without worrying."

The Panel was originally established as an interim measure in 2012 following the publication of the Murrison Report. It identified that the NHS was struggling to support veterans with the same level of prosthetics provision that they had received in the military, and recommended a funding mechanism which was realised as the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel.

For those living in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or overseas, other funding arrangements exist for eligible veterans.

The VPP operates on an annual budget of £6 million, with £1.8 million allocated to cover staffing and infrastructure at the nine Murrison Centres, and the rest covering the costs of the VPP as needed. The Panel meets on the third Tuesday of every month to review applications from Limb Centres in England for components or advanced prosthetics for veterans injured as a result of their military service.

"The Veterans' Prosthetics Panel's overarching aim is to ensure that eligible



Words: Danny Buckland

In just over seven years, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel (VPP) has received 1,950 applications, and has helped almost 500 Blesma Members ranging in age from 25 to 93, with grants totalling almost £12 million

## “THE VPP’S OVERARCHING AIM IS TO ENSURE ELIGIBLE VETERANS ARE ABLE TO ACCESS THE SAME STANDARD OF PROSTHETICS AS THOSE SUPPLIED BY HEADLEY COURT AND STANFORD HALL”

veterans are able to access the same standard of prosthetics as those supplied by DMRC Headley Court and DMRC Stanford Hall,” says Alison Treadgold, Head of Armed Forces Health at NHS England.

The Panel can be approached for funding for anything that is not normally provided through the NHS. If a veteran needs something more than a standard NHS prosthetic or component, and the application is approved, everything from the socket liners to the screws and bolts are covered.

“The central aim of the Panel is to maintain that commitment to the veteran without any detrimental impact on the

NHS and its patients,” adds Brian. “The funding can range from something minor to a double above-knee amputee who needs a pair of Genium X3 knees because their current ones are beyond economic repair.”

Blesma has a non-voting place on the Panel to provide independent and objective oversight, but most of the applications are not contentious.

“Blesma plays a key role on the Panel,” adds Alison. “The Association keeps us on the straight and narrow, reminding us that there is a veteran behind the application. I enjoy working with Blesma and appreciate the support and education given to me. I feel that Blesma’s hard work in raising

the profile of amputee veterans has gone a long way in increasing the standard of prosthetics care for all patients.”

Applications can be returned to the Limb Centres with a request for more information, and Brian has been visiting the centres to help them compile applications that fit the Panel’s criteria, with the biggest area of contention coming from a lack of consistency in applications and administrative slip-ups.

“The process is easier than some would imagine,” Brian says. “The Panel sits in the morning and the Limb Centres are usually notified in the afternoon, with the Member receiving notification within 48 hours.

“There are no plans to change the Panel and its funding, but we are always on watch and if there is a hint that it will change, we will deal with that.”

*For more on the VPP, or if you think you qualify for funding, please contact your BSO, or Brian Chenier on 020 8548 7080*





# LEARNING THE ROPES

WHEN MICHAEL LEWIS DECIDED TO GIVE BOXING A BASH, HE DIDN'T REALISE HE'D DEVELOP A PASSION FOR PUGILISM. THE EX-PARA EVEN "KIND OF ENJOYS BEING PUNCHED IN THE HEAD"

## NEW CHALLENGES



Above and below: Michael works on his stamina and technique on an almost daily basis as he prepares for his second fight

**M**ichael Lewis is being put through his paces by veteran boxing trainer Lee Edwards at the BST Mixed Martial Arts gym in Northampton. He is performing the kind of routines you'd expect from any professional pugilist: sessions of skipping, shadow boxing, and pad pounding, followed by a gruelling round of circuit training which, he admits, often makes him vomit from exhaustion.

He's moving like a natural, which is perhaps not so easy to do when you're a right leg amputee. Michael was hit by artillery fire whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2008, losing his leg and suffering damage to his left arm in the incident. But despite his injuries, Michael is delivering hefty hammer-blow punches in between bobbing and weaving like a champ.

"I fancied the challenge of getting Michael to look and move like a fighter," says Lee, "and he's been brilliant. His work ethic is very impressive!" Michael, a former Paratrooper who had been in training to apply for the Special Forces when he was injured, is loving every minute. He decided to give the sport a go last year when he was looking for his next challenge, and has been completely bitten by the boxing bug.



**"WHEN I STARTED, I WAS THROWING UP AFTER EACH SESSION, BUT I'M FEELING THE BENEFITS NOW. I'M IN THE BEST SHAPE OF MY LIFE – EVEN BETTER THAN WHEN I WAS IN THE PARAS!"**

"I ran the Royal Parks half marathon last October, and after that I wondered what else I could do to test myself," he says. "So I signed up for Contender White Collar Boxing in Bedford. You can raise money for charity through your fights, and I decided to do it for Blesma because the Association has been there for me from day one. The biggest concern I had in the run-up to my first fight was over my leg. Would balance be a huge problem for me?"

### IN THE BEST SHAPE OF HIS LIFE

The sheer intensity of the boxing training, however, caught him off guard. "I thought I was fit from all the running, but this was a wake-up call," laughs Michael. "When I started, I was throwing up after each session. It is very high intensity. I'm doing circuits, hitting a tyre with a sledgehammer, pushing a sledge up and down the gym, I've been skipping and running every day, but I'm definitely feeling the benefits now. I'm in the best shape of my life – even better than when I was in the Paras!"

Michael's first fight, earlier this year, also proved to be a huge learning curve. Even finding an appropriate opponent was difficult. "At first, the organisers suggested another amputee, but I was keen to fight



“MICHAEL IS ALMOST  
TOO POWERFUL  
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LEARNING CURVE  
BECAUSE HE'S  
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PEOPLE ARE GOING  
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Michael started boxing to test himself and improve his fitness. Twelve months on and he says he's never been in better shape

someone able-bodied to prove that anything is possible despite limb loss.

“Two potential opponents pulled out; one of them didn’t want to lose to someone with one leg, or beat an amputee and get a hard time off the crowd. I understand that.

“In the end, they found someone who they thought would be an even match, but on the night he was 20kg heavier than me. He made me look tiny! And he’d had a few fights before, and I could tell that once the bout started.”

Despite losing his debut duel, Michael took a lot of positives from the experience. “I was so excited – nervous but buzzing because of all the training I’d done. The fight was in front of 500 people, including 89 people who I’d sold tickets to. A lot of guys from my old regiment came along.

“There were big chants of ‘2 Para’ as I made my way into the ring, and with all the lights and the music I felt like I was in Las Vegas! It was so loud, but once I was in there, I didn’t hear a sound. I was so in the zone that I didn’t even hear my corner calling out instructions. It’s different from a firefight, because there you take a step back, observe, and assess the situation. I was so focused on that person throwing punches at me, it was quite an experience.”

Michael made it through all three rounds, but his opponent took the win. “In the second round, his experience took over. I felt like I was in survival mode. It was tough, but I learned a lot. He came and saw me at the end of the fight and said his aim had been to knock me out, and that he was surprised I lasted. He went in full pelt. He said he couldn’t believe the fitness I had because he was gassing quite a bit. If it had gone another round I might have got him, so I came away a bit frustrated.”

Since signing on to train with Lee, Michael has made some tweaks to his

technique. “In my first fight, I stood very square on to my opponent, which enabled him to throw heavy shots at me – he was knocking me off balance – but Lee has worked on my stance. I’ve got that dialled in now, and I’m more able to absorb punches. I can anticipate shots better too, so balance hasn’t been an issue.”

#### THE MILITARY MINDSET

Michael has felt the benefits both physically and mentally from his new passion. “Boxing gets you into a different mindset,” he says. “I’ve not struggled with my mental health since being injured because I’ve got a great family around me, but the boxing feels like going back to military training. My coach is like an NCO; I have respect for him and what he’s achieved. I think he finds it easy to work with me because I get on with what I’m told. With Para training, a lot of it is in your head. With boxing, you have people watching and all that adrenaline, so having the extra fitness helps a lot.”

Michael trains three days a week with Lee, and two with the Contender White Collar outfit. “It’s a demanding schedule,” he says. “Although I’ve always been careful about what I eat, I’ve found that with this training I can eat a lot and still lose fat.”

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“I WAS SO EXCITED! I WAS NERVOUS BUT BUZZING BECAUSE OF THE TRAINING THAT I’D DONE. WITH ALL THE LIGHTS AND THE LOUD MUSIC I FELT LIKE I WAS IN LAS VEGAS!”



**“It’s weird, but I kind of enjoy being punched in the head,” admits Michael**

He says it has given him an appreciation of what boxers and mixed martial arts fighters go through. “I’m amazed how hard they train,” he says, “and boxing is different from milling in the Paras. I remember being put against a heavyweight Fijian guy during P Company. I hit him in the head and he didn’t even move! The next thing I knew, I woke up on the mat – he’d knocked me out with a haymaker, but I got maximum points for taking a big punch. Hopefully, my next bout will be more evenly matched.”

### **BENEFIT FROM A BIT OF BOXING**

Michael believes that any Blesma Member could benefit from a bit of boxing training. For those who don’t fancy being walloped (“it’s weird, but I kind of enjoy being punched in the head,” Michael admits), just getting involved in the training can offer a huge fitness boost, and can help amputees with their balance and stability.

Lee Edwards, Michael’s trainer, says the key thing for a Blesma Member interested in combat sports is to find the right coach.

“Look for someone who is willing to help, and who is open to working with your injuries. There are lots of adjustments that amputees can make to help them compete. You need someone who will see that as

a good challenge,” says Lee, who didn’t have a moment’s concern about training Michael. “When Michael walked into the gym, he told me he’d lost his first fight, and I already knew why,” he says. “He was off balance, so we’ve changed a few things. We’re working on him using his distance correctly, so his punches are straight, and we’ve got him moving better. His work ethic is so good, I like him a bit more each time we train! Michael is very powerful – almost too powerful for his current learning curve because he’s so aggressive. We just have to work on his defence a bit.”

Lee says the key to becoming a good boxer is simple: “Repeat. Repeat. Repeat! There are no secret recipes or easy fixes. Just concentrate on your technique and do it until it becomes second nature.”

And he believes that his student will stand a much better chance in his second bout. “Mentally, Michael will be stronger,” says Lee. “He may secretly doubt himself a little, because of his first loss, but I already know that he’s going to feel so different in the ring. People are going to be shocked by how much he has improved.”

*For more, go to [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/michael-lewis50](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/michael-lewis50)*



## **GET FIGHTING FIT WITH A BOOTS ON FOR BLESMA CIRCUIT**

Exercise has been a key factor in many Members’ rehabilitation, and many of them are now competing in prestigious sporting competitions across the world.

A number of Members have created their own personalised military-style circuits, with exercises they like to do to keep fit. The circuits are tailored to all sorts of abilities and fitness levels, so everyone can take part, challenge themselves, and get fitter!

Complete one or more of the circuits, either on your own or as part of a team. You may wish to do a day, a week, or a month of circuits, and you could even get sponsored for each circuit you complete to raise funds for the Association.

*Find more at [www.blesma.org/circuits](http://www.blesma.org/circuits)*



# The incredible military life of Jim Page

AN OFFICER WHO SERVED WITH DISTINCTION IN WWI BEFORE LOSING BOTH LEGS IN 1918 HAS INSPIRED HIS GRANDSON TO SUPPORT BLESMA

**T**he First World War started early for William James ‘Jim’ Page and he remained ‘fighting’ way after he was severely injured on the front line in a mortar attack that cost him both legs in 1918. He escaped internment in Germany twice so that he could enlist at the outbreak of war, and fought through some of the bloodiest battles until he was maimed by shelling less than two months before the Armistice was signed in November 1918.

Jim was gassed twice and suffered multiple wounds, but kept returning to the front line in what was a truly remarkable military career that included battle honours at Arras, Ypres, Passchendaele, Messines, and the Battle of the Somme.

After the Great War, despite struggling to adjust to life back home as a double amputee, he concentrated his firepower on fighting for the disability rights of wounded veterans, and proved to be a charismatic and effective campaigner.

Now, some 56 years after his death aged 75, he is, in part, the inspiration for Blesma being chosen as the charity of the year by the respected law firm Charles Russell Speechlys, whose staff have pledged to 12 months of fundraising and support for the Association.

“Jim fought his way from 1914 to 1918, and did more than four years of trench fighting, being involved in the first and last gas attacks, and surviving the first day of the Battle of the Somme where he fought with the 4th Division at the centre of the line,” says his grandson Christopher Page, who is the senior partner of the firm, which was founded in 1760 and has 600 lawyers and 1,000 staff working in 11 offices globally.

“He was interned twice in Germany but managed to escape so he could join up. He was gassed, wounded, and had the Last Rites administered to him. He was badly wounded at the 1917 Battle of Arras but returned to the front, and had his legs blown off in September 1918 at a spot roughly five miles from where he started in 1914.”

This page and next:  
 Christopher was left  
 a treasure trove of  
 images, documents  
 and letters from  
 Jim's life during  
 and after WWI



*47 Bentley  
 W. H. Bentley*



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

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I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital  
 { ~~sick~~ } and am going on well.  
 { wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.

I am being sent down to the base.  
 (letter dated \_\_\_\_\_  
 I have received your telegram „ \_\_\_\_\_  
 parcel „ \_\_\_\_\_

Letter follows at first opportunity.

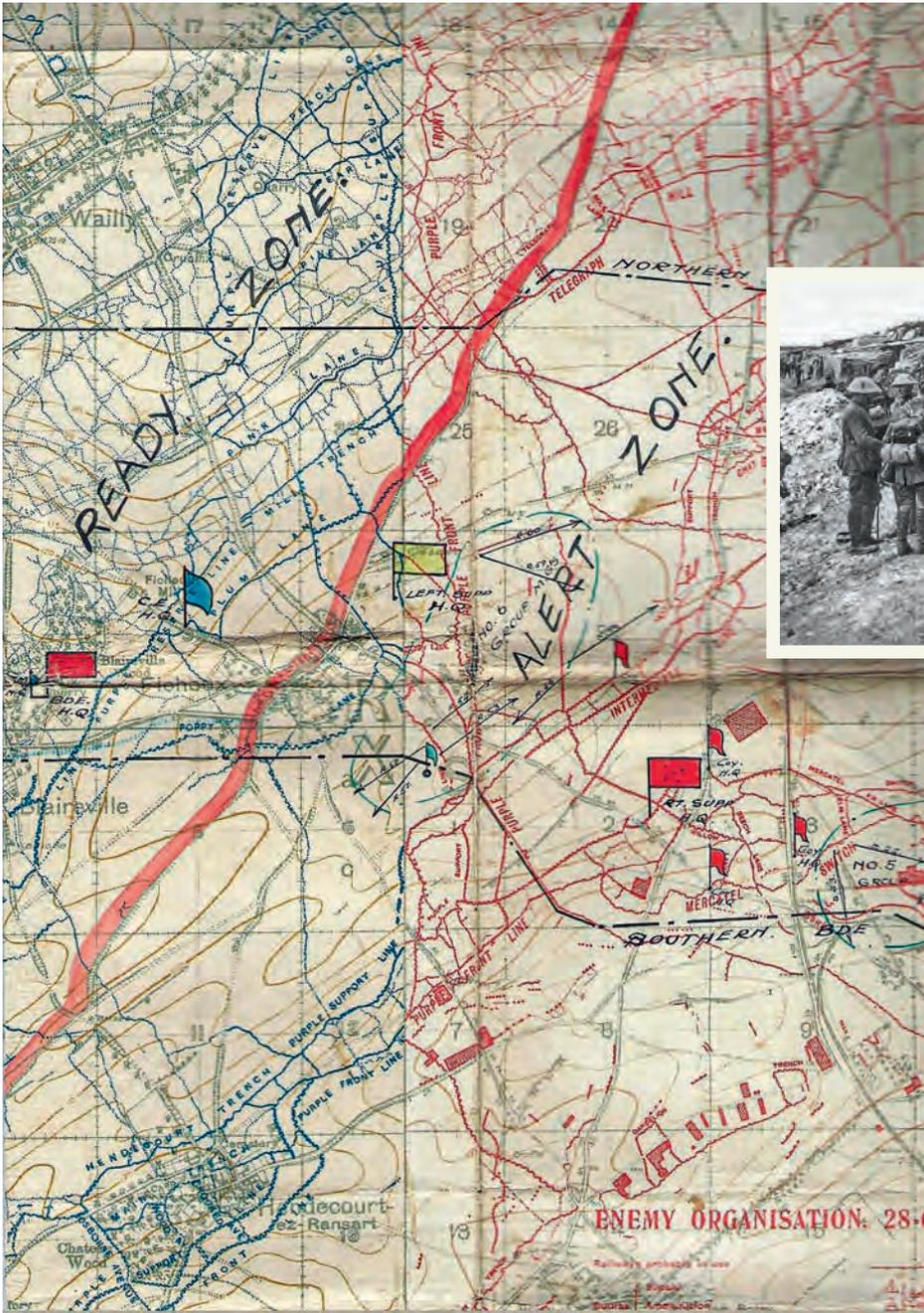
I have received no letter from you  
 { lately  
 { for a long time.

Signature } *W. H. Bentley*  
 only

Date } *18/1/17*

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

W.L. W3497/283. 25046. 0007m. 971A. C & Co., Grange Mills, S.W.



# “He was gassed, wounded, and had the Last Rites administered to him. He returned to the front but had his legs blown off in 1918”

Jim, originally from Kinsale, Ireland, joined the 4th Hussars aged 28 and was transferred to the 3rd and then 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment. In 1915, he joined the 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment that charged into the teeth of withering German machine gun fire on 01 July 1916; the first day of the Somme. Out of 700 officers and soldiers, only 237 survived.

“Grandpa actually got to the German lines and back, but the East Lancashire Regiment suffered horrendous casualties, both on that day and throughout the war,” says Christopher, who last year managed to bring together 50 of Jim’s descendants to retrace his battles and lay flowers on the exact spot of the mortar attack to mark the centenary of the end of Jim’s war.

“Ironically, his worst injury occurred during a period of relative calm, with only the occasional shells going between the lines. By then, he was the Adjutant in the 17th Royal Sussex Regiment, and was caught up in the last gas attack in August 1918 before he was hit by a high explosive, probably a mortar, while he was in a trench known as The Pope’s Nose.”

## LEARNING TO LIVE AS A LIMBLESS VETERAN

Jim returned to England and went through a series of hospitals and convalescent homes as he adapted to life as a double amputee. Christopher has a treasure trove of letters and photographs that chronicle his grandfather’s military life, his love for his sweetheart Mary, whom he married in 1919, and his increasing frustration at the treatment of wounded veterans.

From his hospital bed at No. 8 Field Hospital in France, he wrote to Mary after she was informed of his double amputation: ‘I came here last night and am trying to get to England as soon as possible for your sake. I wouldn’t mind this business a bit for myself, but whatever trouble you make of it will double its effects back on me so be sure not to let it trouble you too much.’

He was transferred to the Red Cross Hospital for Officers in Brighton where he set out his stark service settlement: ‘I got my service gratuity of £509, two thirds savings certificate, and the promise of £69 cash. They are not too generous; I suppose that’s the last I shall get.’ He added: ‘Oh it’s a lovely war: those that don’t get killed will be worried to death.’

“He always said that had he lost his legs any earlier in the war he probably would have died because, by September 1918, the amputation techniques had been hugely improved,” says Christopher. “He was delighted with his first pair of legs, but that delight was short-lived and, for the rest of his life, he was never sorted out with legs suitably long enough. He struggled for

years to get better legs but most days preferred to move around on his stumps. He was allergic to penicillin so had regular infections in his stumps. He was often in pain and found sleep difficult, but he was always a jolly character for us grandchildren.

“He became quite involved in disability pensions and tribunals, fighting the case for amputees. His pension was risible – it makes me cry to look at the amount!

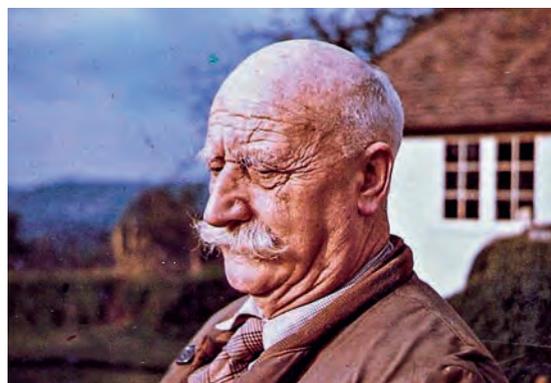
“He was a forceful campaigner and wrote a rather sad comment about the victory march at the end of the war, stating: ‘A month ago we were promised VIP status, now we have been forgotten. It is a shame they have forgotten the mutilated so quickly.’ It was bitter stuff,” says Christopher.

## A MAN OF GREAT TALENT

Jim and Mary settled in Wiltshire, where Jim worked in life insurance and became chairman of the local magistrates’ bench. They brought up four children – Christopher’s father, John, was a General in the Royal Engineers. Jim served as a special constable in WWII.

“He was a fun, playful character, and was great for us children as he was our height on stumps,” adds Christopher, who is a keen military historian. “He was a man of great talent and continued to serve society after the war. It was extraordinary that he managed to do so much. Blesma has a very obvious personal connection and the firm is fully committed to doing its best for the Association across the year. We are hugely impressed by the charity and its Members.”

*The firm’s main fundraising event will be a sponsored trip from the source of the River Thames to Blackfriars Bridge with team members walking, running, cycling, rowing and swimming the near 200-mile course. For more on the law firm Charles Russell Speechlys visit [www.charlesrussellspeechlys.com](http://www.charlesrussellspeechlys.com)*



Words: Danny Buckland



## BOSTON MWENSE

*There's only one thing that Blesma's Head of Finance loves more than numbers – and that's being able to help people*

**I was born in Zambia, in south-central Africa. My dad was a medic in the Zambian Army and wanted me to become a doctor, but I had other ideas. Ultimately, it was my love for numbers that made me decide to become an accountant.**

**I studied Accounting and Finance at university, completed my accountancy exams in 1998, and am now a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in the UK. I moved to the UK under the Home Office's Highly Skilled Migrant Programme and am now a British citizen.**

**My dad, and the military background**

I grew up in, attracted me to the role at Blesma. I joined the Association last May. I like the mix of duties I have to undertake, and the management structure makes for easy decision making, and ensures that we can serve our Members efficiently.

**As Head of Finance my role encompasses**

different activities including facilitating the rolling five-year strategic plan, ensuring compliance with the requirements of governmental and other regulatory bodies like HMRC, liaising with external auditors, budgetary monitoring, managing legacies, and acting as the deputy for the Chief Executive on issues to do with finance.

**I am responsible for leading and motivating the finance**

team to give the Association an efficient and effective service. Maintaining an 'open door policy' ensures my team is well motivated and able to approach me about anything.

**I get fulfilment when my team and I deliver an excellent service in helping Blesma achieve its mission, for example by ensuring welfare grants are paid on time or that information needed for decision making is readily available and accurate.**

**I think Blesma plays an important role that the government perhaps couldn't execute 100 per cent due to competing priorities. Without Blesma, I think some of our injured veterans would be in a much worse place.**

**I do some voluntary work coordinating**

a project for Mary's Meals, which involves raising funds to provide school meals in some of the world's poorest countries. If a child hasn't eaten they can't concentrate in class, so by providing school meals they can get a better learning experience.

**I also serve tea over the weekend to**

those who are lonely or find themselves in a bad situation, or those who simply want to meet other people. It's a chance

for people to interact with others, which can be a great help. I get a lot of fulfilment from my voluntary work.

**I got married to my wife, Alexina, in 2001. I think it was**

love at first sight for me. I asked her out for lunch, but two times she turned me down. I succeeded on the third, and the rest is history. Now we have two daughters together. I love keeping fit and playing chess. I support Chelsea FC, and I sing as part of a quartet in the St Albans Choir.

**“WITHOUT BLESMA, I THINK SOME OF OUR INJURED VETERANS WOULD BE IN A MUCH WORSE PLACE”**

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