

Blesma

The magazine for limbless veterans



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FUNDRAISING
ACTIVITIES

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BLESMA'S MOST NORTHERLY UK MEMBER DISCUSSES LANDMINES, HIS LOVE OF NATURE AND LIFE ON SHETLAND

From Middlesex to outer space

The hi-tech apparatus designed for astronauts that could have a use much closer to home **p26**



Mark's story set for silver screen

The life story of the Afghanistan conflict's first triple amputee is to be made into a film **p32**

The incredible power of Tai Chi

The course that can have a positive impact on balance, mobility and mindset **p48**



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Words: Jessica Mackinnon

Blesma 100 returns to our roads with 150-mile route

ASSOCIATION MEMBER AND AMBASSADOR JONATHAN BELL HAS RALLIED THE TROOPS ONCE AGAIN, ORGANISING A COAST-TO-COAST CYCLE RIDE TO RAISE FUNDS FOR BLESMA

Military veterans – some who are severely injured – have taken on a two-day, 150-mile coast-to-coast cycle challenge across the Pennines and Yorkshire Dales to raise funds for Blesma.

Now in its sixth year, the Blesma 100 – a popular cycle ride organised by Blesma Member and ambassador Jonathan Bell – saw 30 riders set off from Morecambe, Lancashire on 12 June with their sights set on Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast. Along the way, the group cycled some 150 miles and climbed more than 7,000 feet in elevation.

“What a fantastic team effort that showed real camaraderie!” said Jonathan, 57, from

Weybridge in Surrey. “Getting up those hills was tough, and the weather was very warm, but everyone helped each other with lots of encouragement and banter. Crucially, we had a very slick support crew who were on hand to help anyone in trouble and to dish out food and water, as well as motivation when required!”

“In the past, more than 100 riders have taken part in the event, but this year we kept the numbers down to 30 to comply with Government guidelines. The majority of the riders were either from my regiment – 1st Battalion The Green Howards – or were friends and family. They remember when I got injured, and several were

actually with me, so there’s an incredibly strong bond between us.”

Jonathan was seriously injured along with a number of his colleagues in 1993, when a car crashed into their foot patrol on Salisbury Plain. Jonathan was paralysed from the chest down, suffered serious head injuries and had to have one of his feet amputated. Over the years he, along with a number of other soldiers who were injured in the incident, discovered a love for cycling and he has been raising money and awareness for Blesma through cycle rides, known as the Blesma 100.

“It was disappointing to have to cancel the ride last year, and there was always the



A guide to gaming

All you need to know to get online (p38)



Blesma Member, ambassador, and Blesma 100 organiser Jonathan Bell (far left, with the orange helmet)

possibility that this year's event might not go ahead," said Jonathan. "Nevertheless, we were desperate to get out, take on the challenge and, of course, to see our pals again after such a long time.

"For that reason we all trained hard, and that built a real sense of momentum as we kept an eye on social media to see what our pals were up to on their training rides. With hindsight, there is no doubt that training for the event has offered a positive distraction throughout the last few months of this horrendous pandemic."

So far, this year's ride has raised more than £6,000 for the Association

"WE WERE DESPERATE TO GET OUT, TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE, AND SEE OUR PALS AGAIN AFTER SUCH A LONG TIME"

welcome



Welcome to the summer edition of the magazine. As usual, we have a great mix of stories from Blesma Members and supporters. As the Covid lockdown begins to release its grip our fundraisers have walked, cycled, rowed and tabbed hundreds of miles – and

pushed out thousands of press-ups! The Outreach team have begun to conduct live activities once again, while our programme of online events is still going strong. We intend to continue with a mix of live and online activities, with very strong demand for both. A number of Members have told us they are looking forward to finally meeting those they have been online with, either at the Members' Weekend or as part of another group activity.

In this issue, we have outstanding photography from our most northerly UK resident, Kev Bryant (no relation – he's far too talented). Lee Spencer tells us about the exercise equipment designed for astronauts that looks likely to offer real benefit to those with limb loss. Mark Ormrod fills us in on his upcoming film project, and we hear about the benefits of Tai Chi from Maggie Hall and Steve White, who have been taking part in an online programme designed specifically for Blesma. We have advice for Members who are engaging with NHS Multi-Disciplinary Teams, as well as a useful guide for those considering getting into gaming. We have also included an extract from the Trustees' Annual Report for those who have not yet seen a copy.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those who attended our AGM or took the time to submit proxy voting forms. We are a members' association and it is critical that our Members can contribute their views and shape our future. We will include a report on the AGM in the next Bulletin. Enjoy the issue.

Jon Bryant
Chief Executive





Adrenaline junkies ride world's fastest zip wire

Three Members launched themselves back into action after lockdown on the world's fastest zip wire. The event, organised by Outreach Officer for West Jas Suller as soon as restrictions were lifted, gave Members Grant Jenkins, Keith Walker and Stuart Osmundsen the chance to try the experiences at Zip World in Aberdare, South Wales.

The zip lines can hit speeds of 80mph as adventurers hurtle from a tower across a former colliery in the Rhigos mountain range.

"It was great," said Grant, who served 10 years with the Royal Artillery but suffered a car accident in 2007 and had 20 operations before his leg was amputated in 2017. "It



was good to meet Members I've not seen before and to be outside after being stuck in the house for so long."

Stuart, who served in the King's Royal Hussars, was equally impressed. "It was good to talk to people who know what you're on about," he said. "I'm a paraglider and often fly over the area, so it was great to get a different perspective." Former Royal Marine Keith Walker has been a Member for nine years after a rugby accident resulted in his right leg being amputated above the knee.

"The group gelled and it was a great activity. The Association has made an incredible difference to me. It has shown me what I can do and that life does go on," he said.

BURPEES MONTH RAISES MONEY FOR BLESMA

SUFFOLK NEW COLLEGE BROUGHT the local community together in April to take part in a fitness challenge that raised funds for Blesma. The public services team at the college in Ipswich challenged its students and staff to complete 2,000 burpees in a month.

The college also encouraged members of the public as well as those who work in local public services to get involved, and were joined by members of the Parachute Regiment and a number of firefighters.

"It was about bringing people together, keeping people fit, helping our students attain positive mental health via exercise and raising money for charity," said Olly Waters (below right), Progress Tutor at the college who came up with the challenge.

"Blesma Members gave several talks to our students during lockdown which had a really powerful effect on them, so it was our pleasure to be able to give something back."

One of the students taking part, Louis Peters, was really excited to be involved.



"I want to work in the military, so this project meant a great deal to me. I was really up for it," said the 17 year old.

More than 70 students signed up for the challenge, which raised £348 for the Association.

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

TEAM TAKES ON LENGTH OF THAMES

OLYMPIC ROWER PETER REED OBE HAS led a team of injured veterans and able-bodied civilians as they 'virtually' covered the length of the River Thames using hand bikes, rowing machines, SkiErgs, wheelchairs and on foot.

Team Paravengers was made up of retired British rower Andrew Triggs Hodge OBE, amputees Alfie Pope and Stacey Mitchell, quadriplegic Emma Lumb, Alec Harvey and civilians Jeane Corby and Eeke Hodge.

"Five of us met as patients at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Stanford Hall,"

said Blesma Member and former Royal Navy serviceman Pete, who became a patient at the centre in January 2020 after suffering a spinal stroke which resulted in him being partially paralysed from the chest down.

"A big part of rehab is the camaraderie. We looked out for each other at Stanford Hall, so when selecting the crew I thought about who really needed this challenge the most."

The team completed the week-long 346km challenge in March, raising almost £14,000 for Blesma and London Youth Rowing.



Lorraine lost her husband George in December 2019

Online activities helped Lorraine ‘find a purpose’

A Blesma Widow feels as though she has found her purpose again thanks to help from the Association. Lorraine Anderson, who lost her husband George in December 2019, has found a new support network and discovered new hobbies and skills by taking part in the local

online activities that have been organised by the Association over the past year. “Shortly after my husband died, I broke my arm and caught Covid. After I got the plaster off I found myself just sitting at home in a fog. I just gave up,” said the former Ward Sister from Forres, Scotland.

“Then I got an email from Blesma asking if I’d like to attend the Making Connections: Communication workshop. I thought I’d give it a go as all I knew about a laptop was how to turn it on!”

Through the workshop, Lorraine learned basic laptop and video calling skills, which subsequently enabled her to explore and enjoy activities such as yoga, Tai Chi, pottery and shiatsu throughout lockdown. She also rediscovered her love of art.

“The Zoom meetings and activities have meant a lot to me. They have given me a reason to get up in the morning. They have also introduced me to a community I wouldn’t have otherwise met. Several of us now exchange emails and calls outside of the organised activities.”

Lorraine now even hosts an online quiz for Members in Scotland, which has become very popular.

“I have tried to take part in as many activities as possible,” said Lorraine. “There was a big hole in my life after George left, and Blesma’s Zoom activities have filled a bit of that. I’m very grateful.”

Explore and apply for local activities through the Blesma Connects app



DIRECT SOCKET

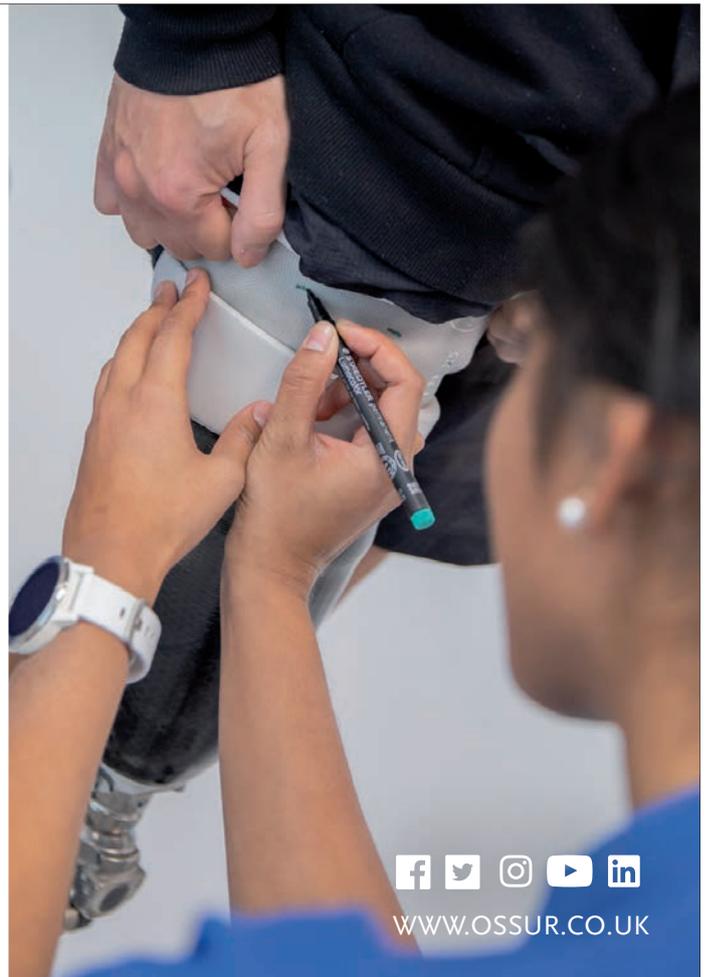
Custom Solutions in One Visit



Mitch Singleton is a retired Royal Marine, keen cyclist and transfemoral amputee. He was one of the first patients to be fitted with a Direct Socket TF.

“I didn’t have to stand up for long periods on one leg and I felt completely at ease. It is unobtrusive, more compact, more comfortable, and the biggest compliment I can give is that I feel connected to my leg again.”

Scan the QR code to read more about Mitch’s Direct Socket journey.



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Wilf (bottom left) with soldiers from 4th Yorks Battalion, Green Howards

CHAPTER 1 THE WASTED YEARS

Our honeymoon was over, literally. Unemployment wasn't news then, in 1918, so when I received the curt note there was little alarm in that small terrace house, 10 Byelands Street.

Maybe, I thought, it was needed to jolt me into that new, more ambitious job. Neither "Chum" nor I realised that the "reconstruction" (closing of plants to concentrate and streamline) was going on all over.

Those out of work - the regulars - were of course lazy, like the papers said. I was a skilled draughtsman. We had no commitments. All our furniture was paid for and the house mortgage (£200 down for the £600 loan) ran only 15% per week. Council houses on the new estates were a music hall joke and anyway slum clearance people predominated on these very unattractive sites.

My disablement pension under the new Royal Warrant was £1 per week and I was earning £4-10-0. We hoped to have a year or so there and then move out to a country suburb as I became able to afford fares etc, and there to start our family. This check was a nuisance but not alarming.

Unemployment and health insurance then was



Road named after Blesma's Wilf

The legend of WWI veteran, social campaigner and Blesma Member Wilf Whitfield lives on after a road was named in his honour in his home town of Middlesbrough. Wilfred Whitfield Way stands on the site of a former iron works (below) where Wilf got his first job as a 14 year old before volunteering for duty and losing his right arm at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Wilf, who was only 18 when he was injured, fought for workers' rights and social justice after the war. He was vital in establishing the Teeside Branch of Blesma and fighting for the 40,000 WWI amputees who came home to discover that only about 10 per cent of them could regain employment.

Both his service and civilian life were documented in a revelatory diary he kept that was discovered by his grandchildren

and published as *Wasted Effort, A Journal of the First World War*.

Middlesbrough Council chose Wilf because of his unique connection to the site and his inspirational role as a campaigner.

"It was fantastic and very emotional when they told us they were naming a road after Wilf," said granddaughter Alison



An iron works originally stood on the site

Fellows. "I am sure Wilf would have been delighted as he was passionate about Middlesbrough and the area. It is fitting as he started his working life in the blast furnaces on that site when they would have been hellish places to work. He came back from the war disabled but that didn't stop him fighting for other veterans and starting the local branch of Blesma.

"I hope more people will learn about our grandfather and what he stood for when they hear about Wilfred Whitfield Way. The road name is a lovely tribute to him."

Wilf, who served as a Lieutenant in the 4th Yorks Battalion, the Green Howards, died in 1958, aged 62.

Read about Wilf's life in the Summer 2016 issue of Blesma Magazine at <https://blesma.org/news-media/publications>



James completes 48-hour march to honour mum

Serving Corporal James Kirby has completed a 48-hour march for Blesma in memory of his mum, who died after contracting coronavirus. Starting on Friday 30 April, James marched from the Cenotaph in Preston to ITC Catterick and back – a total of 154 miles – in honour of his “beautiful mum”.

Denise, who was a double amputee, died in hospital on 12 March, aged just 59.

“Mum lost both her legs through diabetes and had a stroke which resulted in her losing the use of her hands, but she always had a bit of banter. She was tough,” said James. “During the march I carried 59 pounds to honour mum’s age and I decided on a 48-hour challenge because I sat with her for two days as she took her last breaths. The route I marched was the



same one I drove the day I got a call from the hospital saying mum was going to die. It was tough to remain calm and I had to have a lot of mental resilience in mum’s last moments. I used the same resilience to get through the march and release my grief in a positive way.”

James raised more than £8,000 for Blesma from his 48-hour challenge.

“I got a lot of support from different people and collected £517 in the Blesma bucket along the way. I’m honoured that I could do it for Blesma, knowing it will help somebody in a similar situation to my mum.”

Following the challenge, the British Army has nominated James to attend an Armed Forces Thank You garden party at the National Arboretum for going above and beyond the call of duty, for which James said he was “honoured”.

STEVE FAST-TRACKS HIS WAY TO NEW SKILLS THANKS TO ZOOM

STEVE FISHER has Zoomed his way to a new set of skills that have transformed his life. The long-term Member, who was injured during The Falklands War, used Blesma’s array of online training and interest courses to discover the benefits of shiatsu therapy, controlled breathing and candle making during lockdown.

“It’s made a massive difference to me,” said Steve. “It has been great to learn new things over Zoom. I now practise the shiatsu and breathing every day, and they really help with my pain.”

Steve, 65, from Swansea, had his right leg amputated below the knee having endured years of pain after he was hit by shards of an RAF Harrier Jump Jet’s Sidewinder missile in the Falklands.

“My wife Vee is just completing a watercolour painting course and has thoroughly enjoyed that, too,” said the former Welsh Guardsman. “The Zoom courses have made a big difference, and we are so thankful to Blesma for putting them on during lockdown.”



NEWS BRIEFS

LIGHTWEIGHT WHEELCHAIR WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

Ex-Paratrooper Steve Binns needed to upgrade his wheelchair; but an active lifestyle that includes playing wheelchair tennis and rowing, as well as an interest in motorsport, meant he needed something compact and lightweight.

“I’ve been a paraplegic for 39 years and because I’m very active, I struggle with wear and tear of the shoulders,” said the 58 year old, who was paralysed following a motorcycle accident 20 days after returning from serving in The Falklands War. “I was looking for a lightweight wheelchair, but the lighter they are the more they cost. I approached Blesma for the extra financial support, and my Support Officer Tom came up with the goods.

“Within two weeks of having the new wheelchair, I noticed the difference. My shoulder pain has reduced, my posture has improved, and I can push longer and faster. I’m chuffed with it!” said Steve.



SUPPORTER MARKS BIRTHDAY WITH A 50-DAY CHALLENGE

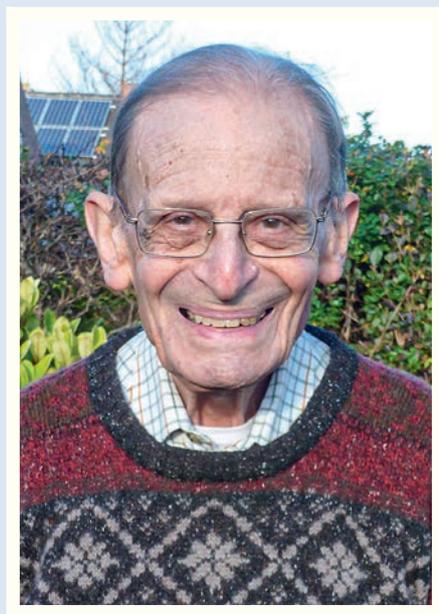
Blesma supporter Iain McAfee celebrated his fiftieth birthday with a 50-day challenge in aid of Blesma. “Each day, I walked an average of five miles and completed 100 press-ups. By the end, I’d clocked up 250 miles and 5,000 press-ups,” said Iain, who lives in Ballymoney, Northern Ireland.

Iain was joined by several Members along the way. “The fact that veterans were prepared to come out and support me makes me happy. It was great to meet and hear the stories of those the charity helps.”

Iain raised £1,384 for the Association.

In the spotlight

Braham Myers



Braham Myers lost his right leg below the knee while serving with the Royal Artillery in World War II. Over the years that followed, he played a key role on a number of charity committees, including becoming the Chairman of the Blesma Leeds Branch and Honorary Treasurer for the Association's National Executive. Braham celebrated his 100th birthday in February but sadly passed away on 24 May at his care home in Ilkley. He spoke to *Blesma Magazine* shortly before this, and his family have expressed a wish for his story to be told.

"I was born in Harrogate in 1921 and lived there until I was 13, when my family moved to Leeds. In 1939, I went to Cambridge as I had won a university scholarship, but I was deferred for two years so I could take a war degree. We all had to join some form of service, so I joined the Royal Artillery in 1941.

"My training took me all over the UK, and it was an extraordinary experience. I remember one exercise in Scotland when we were supposed to be training in snow warfare as we thought we'd be sent to Norway. Typically, Scotland had no snow during the exercise and when it came to being posted, we ended up being below sea level in Holland! That was typical of the Army; we did the opposite of what you expected."

BRAHAM AND WORLD WAR II

"We were posted just over the Dutch border from Antwerp, where we were tasked with capturing the banks of the River Scheldt so we could get supplies up there. The Germans held both sides of the river, and it was our job to try to clear them out of that part of Holland. The weather was ghastly: it poured with rain and the guns got stuck in the mud, but eventually we did it and advanced into Germany.

"I spent a lot of time on the Dutch-German border and, by February 1945, it was obvious we were on the home straight because there was very little action from the German Air Force. I was now a junior officer and

was sent to reconnoitre an area. I discovered it was where the German artillery had built somewhere to protect their ammunition before they had to draw back. I should have had more sense I suppose, because the Germans had been burying lots of shoe mines deep in the soil at the time. I trod on one of those bloody things and it blew my leg off!

"Fortunately, there were a few people around and, very bravely I think now, they came and rescued me. I was carted off to hospital, and four days later I was flown back to a hospital in Worcester.

"I ended up in Chapel Allerton Hospital where they eventually sorted me out. That was when I was contacted by an amputee who had served in WWI, who reckoned he had enrolled at least 1,000 amputees into Blesma. In those days, the Association used to go around the hospitals giving out cigarettes and sweets, and recruiting amputees to Blesma. I joined that day!"

BRAHAM AND THE ASSOCIATION

"In the 1950s, after I'd married and my wife and I were living in Leeds, I finally decided to attend a Branch meeting. The whole thing was astounding – there were at least 100 people there. Straight away I was put on the committee as I was young, and that's how I started to get heavily involved with Blesma.

"Two years later, I was elected onto the National Committee. I chaired the annual conference and even became the Association's Honorary Treasurer. There was a conference by the seaside every year which Government ministers or sometimes senior civil servants would attend. There were some ferocious attacks on the Government, which not only had an effect for Members but helped others with disabilities, too. I carried on until I was in my 70s and was even awarded an MBE for my services in 1985.

"Blesma had some amazing events too, including a sports day – I never won anything, but it was great fun. One year, the Assistant General Secretary managed to hold a sports day on an RAF airfield near Doncaster.

“

THE GERMANS HAD BEEN BURYING SHOE MINES IN THE SOIL. I TROD ON ONE OF THESE BLOODY THINGS AND IT BLEW MY LEG OFF!

”

Make time for Tai Chi

Could you benefit from online sessions? (p48)

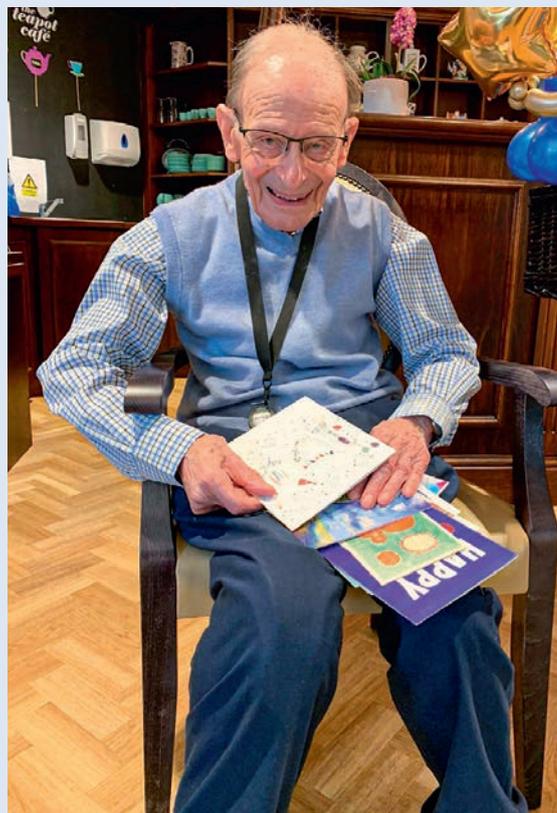


We decided Douglas Bader should open it, and he arrived in his own aircraft but then didn't know how to land it!

“After the end of World War II, I was seconded to the Ministry of Education and then I went on to complete a history degree on a Cambridge University scholarship. Eventually, I joined the family business JW Myers Ltd – it was the last flat cap factory in England – where I spent the rest of my career before retiring in 1986. Outside of work, I have chaired the board of governors at High Royds, a former psychiatric hospital in Leeds, and more recently I volunteered to collect and classify people’s memories for the Second World War Experience Centre’s archive in Otley, for which I also shared my story.

“I celebrated my 100th birthday earlier this year – on 22 February. Being 100 is an odd feeling. I received video messages from family and friends, as well as from the Association. I’ve had an amazing life and have had the chance to meet many interesting people, including royalty, but the highlight over the past century has been marrying my wife, Lola. Ours was a six-year courtship before she agreed to marry me, and since then we have travelled the world together for both business and pleasure.”

Braham is survived by his wife Lola, as well as his three daughters and three grandsons



Braham celebrated his 100th birthday earlier in the year

↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

Who's who in a specialised MDT

Ensuring amputees have the best treatment requires the skill and expertise of a range of specialists. BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier looks at a Multi-Disciplinary Team



During the life course of living with limb loss there might be occasions when you require the help of a specialised Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). This could be because you have recently become an amputee or perhaps something significant has changed in your situation, such as needing revision or further surgery, or your goals and aspirations might have changed. An MDT can also be useful when considering a significant change in prosthetic prescription, such as progressing to a more advanced prosthesis like a Microprocessor Controlled Knee (MPK). Whatever the reason, understanding who might be present, and what their role will be, can help with a potentially daunting situation...

PATIENT

As the patient, you will be at the centre of everything and should feel empowered to have your say. You may wish to have somebody with you when you attend an MDT meeting – a partner or spouse, for example, or an advocate such as your BSO or myself as BSO (Prosthetics).

The following members of an MDT are usually based in the rehabilitation service centre and have in-reach to the wards. You will no doubt have had dealings with some of them in your time. Not all Limb Centres have all this expertise on site permanently, and may bring in specialist clinicians as required. In some areas, the term MDT is replaced with Inter-Disciplinary Team (IDT). Each Member of an MDT – including the patient – brings their own experience and knowledge.

CONSULTANT IN REHABILITATION MEDICINE

The consultant (who usually has a special interest in amputee rehabilitation) should be responsible for the overall clinical care of the patient, although it is appropriate for other team members to lead on specific areas of care. In the current NHS structure, the consultant physician is generally considered to be the most appropriate team leader. Supporting medical staff may include an Associate Specialised Staff Grade Doctor or a Clinical Assistant for Service Provision, and a Specialised Registrar in Rehabilitation Medicine undertaking training.

PROSTHETISTS

Prosthetists provide the best possible artificial limb for patients who have lost or were born without a limb. All prosthetists are able to assess, diagnose, prescribe and provide appropriate prosthetic treatment. Designated prosthetists should manage or oversee the prosthetic care of patients with rarer types of limb loss, such as congenital limb deficiency or upper or multiple limb loss, in order to develop and maintain the specialised experience necessary to meet the needs of these patients.

PROSTHETIC TECHNICIANS

Their main role is to manufacture the various types of prosthetic devices (protheses) supplied by their specialist rehabilitation service centre. Technicians are supplied with a measurement sheet, body cast, body tracing or a job card by a prosthetist. The technician will then manufacture the required prosthesis using a wide range of materials including plastics, metals, leather, carbon fibre, and composite materials. All of the prostheses manufactured are bespoke – designed specifically for each patient. Frequently, the technician will be involved in the design stage. Some of the manufacturing may be carried out at a central fabrication facility, but the technician will still be available to conduct repairs.



AS THE PATIENT, YOU WILL BE AT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING AND SHOULD ALWAYS FEEL EMPOWERED TO HAVE YOUR SAY



Remote Working

Meet Blesma's most northerly UK Member (p18)



PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Specialist physiotherapists should be experienced in lower limb pre-prosthetic and prosthetic rehabilitation/ gait re-education skills training, have a good understanding of prosthetics, be able to look after limb loss patients with complex problems, and be conversant with the evidence-based clinical guidelines produced by the British Association of Chartered Physiotherapy in Amputee Rehabilitation (BACPAR). They should have skills in goal setting and use of outcome measures. They should also be able to liaise with, advise and educate the other MDT members in the referring (acute) and rehabilitating hospitals.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

They are responsible for prosthetic limb training for patients with upper limb amputation or congenital deficiencies, including training in one-handed activities where relevant. They also undertake training for activities of daily living for both upper and lower limb amputees, and arrange home or school visits in liaison with physiotherapists and community therapists. A suitably experienced occupational therapist should be a member of the core clinical team at all specialised rehabilitation service centres. They should have undertaken training in tissue viability and wound management, and have a good understanding of prosthetics and amputee rehabilitation.

REHABILITATION ENGINEERS

A Rehabilitation Engineer should be available to advise on technical matters related to the quality, maintenance, risk management, assessment and prescription (e.g. gait analysis), procurement and disposal of prosthetic devices. Rehabilitation Engineers can be either Clinical Scientists or Clinical Technologists.

ORTHOTISTS

While prosthetists create and fit artificial limbs, orthotists are responsible for correcting nerves, muscles and bones by using a range of aids. Within their Health and Care Professions Council registration they will be able to assess, diagnose, prescribe, and provide appropriate orthotic treatment.

Each member of a Multi-Disciplinary Team – including the patient – brings their own experience and knowledge

ASSISTANT PRACTITIONER

Assistant Practitioners act under the guidance of a healthcare professional. The role is varied but can include washing and dressing, feeding, helping people to mobilise, toileting, and monitoring a patient by checking their temperature, pulse, breathing and weight.

PODIATRIST

A podiatrist should be available, or appropriate links with local podiatric services must be established, particularly to provide care for the remaining foot in unilateral lower limb diabetic or dysvascular amputees.

PSYCHOLOGIST/COUNSELLOR

A counselling service must be provided by clinical counsellors who have experience of working in a rehabilitation setting. Although basic counselling will indirectly be provided by many members of the MDT, patients at all centres should have the option of seeing a qualified clinical counsellor. The counsellor should also be available to meet with relatives or carers of the amputee. A clinical psychologist with experience in dealing with the particular issues of patients with physical disabilities should be available to see selected patients. Dieticians provide advice on nutrition to improve health, and aid in weight maintenance and healthy living.

SOCIAL WORKER

A hospital social worker/care manager should be available to establish the appropriate links with Social Services, to identify any continuing healthcare needs, to give advice regarding benefits and other financial matters, and to be involved with plans for discharge from the acute hospital.

PEER GROUP VOLUNTEERS

These are available on a part-time basis to talk with, and offer help to, any patients who are interested.

If you have a question or would like advice on any prosthetics issues, please contact Brian Chenier BSO (Prosthetics) at Blesma Chelmsford on 020 8548 7080 or at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org, or visit www.blesma.org



Words: Jessica Mackinnon, Danny Buckland



Scotland swings into action with golf day

The first post-lockdown face-to-face activity in Scotland went with a swing as Members enjoyed a day of golf practice and tuition in May. The eight-strong group were put through their paces on the driving range and putting green at the Mearns Castle Golf Academy, in Glasgow.

“We had a lesson from the golf pro and everyone felt they improved,” said Outreach Officer Scotland Emma Gratton. “It was great to get some tips, but everyone really enjoyed being out and meeting Members.”

Former Royal Navy aircraft handler Stu Padley, who suffered a stroke that caused mobility issues in his right arm three years ago, enjoyed the expert tuition with his dad.

“It was a great day,” said Stu’s father, Neil. “Stu’s golf is getting better and he’s won a couple of competitions. The golf cart funded by Blesma has made a big difference and it was great to meet other Members.”

Olivia Zambonini, a former Royal Signals radio operator who was medically discharged in 2016 after being diagnosed with MS and sight problems, has spent most of the last year shielding. “It was great to get out, do something and spend some time with other people,” said Olivia, who also served in the Adjutant General’s Corps. “Blesma gave me a couple of golf lessons a few years ago so it was nice to be able to start again. I’ve actually got another golf day booked in Perth, which is great.”

“IT FEELS MY LIFE JUST GETS BETTER EVERY MINUTE!”

Roger Dorey, who served in the Royal Navy for eight years, had relied on family and friends to leave his home and complete basic food shops since he became a bilateral above-knee amputee in 2019, but a Blesma-funded electric wheelchair has allowed him to complete his first solo outing in two years.

“I was diagnosed with peripheral arterial disease, which is the reason I lost both my legs but also means I can’t use prosthetics,” said the 78 year old, whose right leg was amputated in 2011, and his left leg in 2019.

“I was given a wheelchair after both amputations, but I couldn’t even wheel myself to the local shops because the ground was too rough and I’ve got to be careful not to overload my body.

“I was told I wasn’t eligible for an electric wheelchair, but within a couple of weeks of joining the Association my Support Officer got me one. It feels as though my life just gets better every minute!”



Roger with his electric wheelchair

SPECIALIST PROSTHETIC WILL COMPLETE HIGHLAND DRESS

A WORLD CHAMPION PIPE BAND drummer, who lost his right leg below the knee due to diabetes, is trying to get a specialist prosthetic made which will have space for his Sgian Dubh.

Scott Campbell (pictured near right) wants the prosthetic to complete his piper’s full highland dress. The Sgian Dubh (pronounced ‘ski-en doo’), is a small knife that is worn tucked into the top of the sock, or kilt hose as it is traditionally called.

“I’m a drummer in the Vale of Atholl Pipe Band and was the former leading drummer for the 7 SCOTS Pipe & Drums,” said the 45 year old from Dundee. “I’ve performed



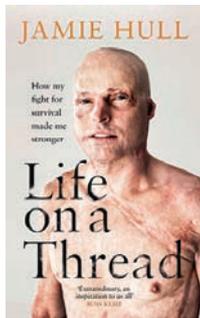
Scott Campbell (left)

all over the world at festivals and tattoos. After I had my amputation, my pipe major asked how I was going to get a sock over my prosthetic but I actually couldn’t get one to stay up, so I’m currently matching my prosthetic limb to the colour of the socks.

“The Sgian Dubh is a traditional part of the uniform. I’m researching different companies and organisations that might be able to help – I’m hoping someone can build a prosthetic which can house the Sgian Dubh. This is not a hobby for me – it’s a lifestyle. My next task will be raising the funds for it, so I’m also looking into how I can raise the money for the limb.”

Members in print

Blesma Members have been busy putting their life stories on paper. In the first of a regular feature, here are a few of the books that should be on your reading list this summer



LIFE ON A THREAD - HOW MY FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL MADE ME STRONGER
JAMIE HULL

FORMER SAS TROOPER AND TRAINEE pilot Jamie Hull provides a searing account of the cockpit fire that left him on the verge of death and tells how he emerged from the wreckage to forge a new life.

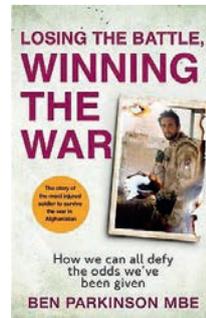
The project took two years to develop, with Jamie having to relive the incident and the seven years of major surgery needed to deal with the fourth-degree burns he suffered over more than 63% of his body.

“It was a long process, but I am delighted for the book to be out there,” he said. “You are exposing a piece of your soul to the public when you write a book like this, and that’s a big deal. I hope my story can help other people. I do public speaking and my story seems to resonate, so putting it in a book seemed logical. If I have been able to pick up the pieces and drive forward then I think it will provide hope for a lot of people.”

Jamie, 45, recounts how he had to endure more than 60 operations under general anaesthetic. While he was battling with the trauma of the accident and its aftermath, he became a professional scuba instructor, completed the 3,000-mile Race Across America, forged a career as a motivational speaker and raised huge amounts for military charities.

The book’s cover features an image that was taken for the special issue of *Blesma Magazine* that commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI.

Life on a Thread is published by Ebury Press. The print and audio books can be bought from www.penguin.co.uk



LOSING THE BATTLE, WINNING THE WAR
BEN PARKINSON MBE

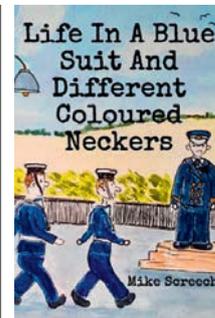
PARATROOPER BEN PARKINSON WAS left with 37 injuries when his Land Rover hit a mine in Helmand in 2006. He broke his back and his pelvis, lost both his legs and suffered brain damage. Doctors feared he would not survive, but the former Lance Bombardier from Doncaster battled against the odds, and his extraordinary story is told in *Losing the Battle, Winning the War*.

Ben, now 37, has no recollection of the incident so had to talk to former regimental comrades to piece together what happened to him in Afghanistan to include it in his inspirational life story.

“I hope that people will be inspired by my story and that it will help them. The book seems to be going well and my message to Blesma Members, and anyone else for that matter, is: ‘Keep going. Never give up!’” said Ben, who carried the Olympic Torch through his home town in the build up to the 2012 Paralympics.

“Ben started the book before lockdown, so it’s taken about 18 months to complete,” said his father, Andy. “He found it quite demanding and it was a big jigsaw puzzle to put together, but the book has already received some good reviews and he is delighted that it might help and inspire other people.”

Losing the Battle, Winning the War is published by Little, Brown and can be bought from www.littlebrown.co.uk Blesma has three copies to give away on a first come, first served basis. If you would like a copy contact the Communications Team on 07770 919760 or email storiesandpress@blesma.org



LIFE IN A BLUE SUIT AND DIFFERENT COLOURED NECKERS
MIKE SCREECH

FORMER ROYAL NAVY CHIEF PETTY Officer Mike Screech has catalogued the fun and challenges of his early days of service as a junior rating and bandsman.

Mike, who had two spells in the Royal Navy, experienced life on shore bases as well as at sea on HMS Belfast, HMS Hardy, and HMS Phoebé – which was one of the frigates used to depict the fictitious HMS Hero in the BBC TV drama *Warship*.

“I was also a scout all through my time in the Navy and have some great memories of both organisations,” said Mike, from Taunton, Somerset, who is donating profits from the book sales to Blesma.

“There are lots of incidents and scrapes in the book. I had to catch a plane to join back up with my ship after it sailed from Portugal without me, and in Singapore a bullet went through the drum I was carrying and almost hit my leg!”

“There were tough times as well as the fun, but I had a great time in the Navy and with scouting, and I hope people enjoy reading about both.”

Mike, 74, came out of the Navy after nine years but rejoined after trying a series of jobs and served until 1987. He is now planning a follow-up book to cover his second stint of service.

Life in a Blue Suit and Different Coloured Neckers is available via bookshops and on Amazon Kindle

OBITUARIES

Those we have lost

Alasdair Carnegie

19 July 1935 - 21 April 2021

ALASDAIR WAS BORN IN ST ANDREWS, Fife and brought up on the Shetland Islands and in Inverness. He lost his left leg above the knee as a result of injuries sustained in military service with the Royal Engineers between September 1953 and October 1963.

After leaving the Armed Forces as a Lieutenant he joined Esso Petroleum as an engineer. Alasdair was asked to join the Disabled Drivers' Motor Club (DDMC) and soon become a member of the club's National Committee. Within a few years, his expertise and knowledge led to his appointment as the club's Chairman.

Under Alasdair's leadership, the DDMC blossomed and he set up a working group to look at amalgamating with the Disabled Drivers Association. This, in turn, led to the formation of a single charity; Disabled Motoring UK.

As his experience in the disability world grew, he was invited to join the Executive Committee of Disablement in London. In 1980, Alasdair became a founding director of the charity Employment Opportunities for the Disabled, which specialised in

“HIS WORK WITH VARIOUS CHARITIES AND GROUPS LED TO IMPROVEMENTS FOR SERVICE AND EX-SERVICE AMPUTEES, AS WELL AS CIVILIANS”

helping disabled people find their way into employment. He served as Chairman of the Portsmouth Disability Forum, established and chaired the Hampshire Strategy Group on Employment and Disability, and represented Portsmouth (and more generally the UK) at functional rehabilitation conferences all over Europe.

As a member of the International Society of Prosthetics and Orthotics he worked with Aberdeen University on the development of the Aberdeen Pressure Cushion and acted as a guinea pig in the development of the total surface bearing socket which addressed the effects of high



pressure points and the frailty of human tissue of prosthetics wearers.

On many occasions, being a member of both Blesma and the Limbless Association, Alasdair was consulted regarding issues that are faced by amputees in everyday life. His work with various charities and groups has led to many improvements for Service and ex-Service amputees, as well as their civilian counterparts.

Alasdair also wrote five books, all available on Amazon. His first, *I Leapt To My Foot*, is a memoir that reflects, with humour, his personal progress through five decades living as an amputee.

Jim Chittenden

31 December 1923 - 04 May 2021

JIM CHITTENDEN ENLISTED INTO the Pathfinders at the age of 18 and served in North Africa, Italy, Greece and France during World War II.

Jim originally served as part of 21st Independent Parachute Company before moving to 1st Independent Parachute Platoon. As a Pathfinder, he took part in Operation Dragoon in southern France in August 1944 and was subsequently awarded the Legion d'Honneur – France's highest order of merit – for his involvement in the operation. He sustained his injuries on landing in Sicily.

Jim married Winnie in March 1948 and started married life as a roof glazier, living in Kings Cross. In 2015, he led the



Blesma contingent past The Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. Jim was very proud of his four children, seven grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren, and they were – and are – very proud of him.

Braham Myers

22 February 1921 - 24 May 2021



BRAHAM MYERS lost his right leg below the knee while serving with the Royal Artillery in World War II.

During the years that followed, he played a key role on many charity committees, including becoming the Chairman of the Blesma Leeds Branch and Honorary Treasurer for the Association's National Executive.

Braham celebrated his 100th birthday in February but sadly passed away on 24 May at his care home in Ilkley. Read his full life story on p10.

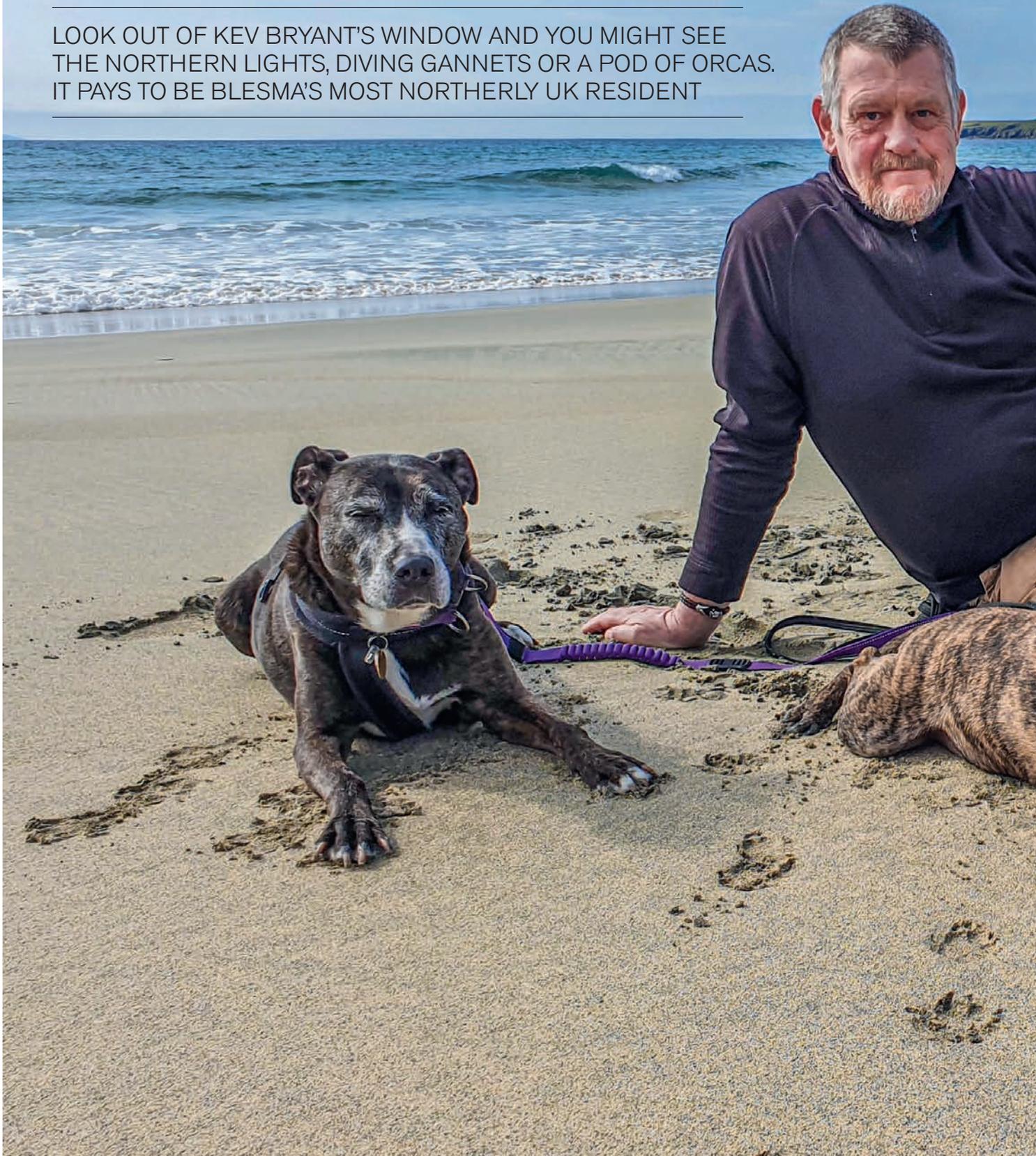
Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace.

AUGER J W	ARMY (ROYAL SIGNALS)	HQ (LEWISHAM)	NOT KNOWN
BIRKETT M	ARMY (COLDSTREAM GUARDS)	HQ (BIRMINGHAM)	NOT KNOWN
BUDGE E C	ARMY (ACC)	HQ	NOT KNOWN
CARNEGIE A B F	ARMY (RE)	PORTSMOUTH	21/04/2021
DIXON C C R	ARMY (RAC)	SOUTHAMPTON	26/03/2021
DOMAGALA W	ARMY (POLISH CORPS)	HQ (BRISTOL)	22/04/2021
FOSTER J V	ARMY (17TH/21ST LANCERS)	NOTTINGHAM	11/03/2021
FROST T	ARMY (DUKE OF WELLINGTON)	HQ (HUDDERSFIELD)	12/05/2021
GREGORY J	ARMY (ROYAL SIGNALS)	HQ	MARCH 2021
HARRIS I	RAF	HQ	13/03/2021
HEATH A C	RAF	HQ	NOT KNOWN
HEGGIE R M A	CIVILIAN CASUALTY	HQ	MAY 2021
HILTON R	ARMY (ACC)	HQ	NOT KNOWN
JEFFERY G R	RN	HQ	19/04/2021
JOHNSTONE I D	ARMY (RE/AAC)	HQ	14/04/2021
MACHELL W	ARMY (LANARKSHIRE YEOMANRY)	HQ	NOT KNOWN
MASON D M	ARMY (ROYAL SIGNALS/ RCT)	HQ	MARCH 2021
MERCER S A	RAF	HQ	NOT KNOWN
MILLER D A	ARMY (DEVONSHIRE & DORSET)	BOURNEMOUTH	04/04/2021
MILLS J W	ARMY	HQ	18/02/2021
MYERS B J	ARMY (RA)	HQ (LEEDS)	24/05/2021
O'NEILL V R	ARMY (GRENADIER GUARDS)	HQ	25/02/2021
PASK A L	RAF	NOTTINGHAM	15/04/2021
POINTER G E	RM	HQ (PRESTON)	APRIL 2021
SCOTT A M	ARMY (RTR)	HQ	APRIL 2021
SCOTT A R	ARMY (RE)	HQ (E BERKS)	30/03/2021
TREVOU Y	ARMY (17TH/21ST LANCERS)	SUTTON & MERTON	19/03/2021
VAN ZELLER C P	ARMY (SOMERSET & CORNWALL LI)	HQ (NORWICH)	FEBRUARY 2021
WARNE K V	ARMY (RE)	HQ	19/03/2021
WATSON A B	ARMY (RAOC)	HQ	17/05/2021

REMOTE WORKING

LOOK OUT OF KEV BRYANT'S WINDOW AND YOU MIGHT SEE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS, DIVING GANNETS OR A POD OF ORCAS. IT PAYS TO BE BLESMA'S MOST NORTHERLY UK RESIDENT



Kev and his dogs,
Kim and Clyde, on
Shetland's St Ninian's
Isle, the longest
tombolo in the UK



Words: Nick Moore. Photography: Kev Bryant and (left) Cheryl Haynes



“The Northern Lights are known as the ‘Mirrie Dancers’ in Shetland, and we often see them dancing to the north of our home,” says Kev

Kev Bryant could well be Blesma’s most remote Member. Originally from Reading, he has lived on Shetland – which is closer to the North Pole than either Oslo, Stockholm or Helsinki – since 2010. The former Royal Engineer saw a huge amount of the world in his career, working in bomb disposal in countries such as The Falklands, Congo and Laos, and was injured clearing mines in Lebanon in 2002. Now working for the Army Cadet Force, the nature enthusiast and talented photographer (these are a selection of his own images) explains why there’s nowhere else he would rather live than on one of Britain’s most far-flung outposts – even when the winds are blowing at more than 100mph...

Tell us about your military career

I had family in the military and respected the Armed Forces when I was growing up. I joined the Royal Engineers in 1975, at the age of 16. I served for 24 years and had various postings over the years, including to Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Germany, Gibraltar, USA, the Falkland Islands and Ascension Island. I did two stints in the

Falklands, which I loved. I also met my wife Cheryl out there, who was in the Army working as a radiographer.

How did you end up in bomb disposal?

I was posted to Royal Engineers bomb disposal in 1994 and stayed with them for the remainder of my career. In the Falklands, I was responsible for clearing ordnance from battlefield sites and destroying mines that were in danger of migrating from minefields, as well as maintaining minefield fences and signs. When I eventually decided to leave the military I went to Kosovo as part of my pre-release, where I worked for a company clearing cluster bombs and ordnance. I enjoyed it so much that I signed up to work with them after I left.

And that led to your injury...

Yes. I was clearing Israeli and Hezbollah mines and booby traps in Lebanon. In July 2002, we were clearing three lines of mines on sloped ground with no markings. We would dispose of them by placing explosive charges next to them before standing back and blowing them up. I would then go

back in and check the site. On this particular day, I couldn’t see anything wrong, but as I went forward there was an explosion. I think my foot came into contact with a mine that had been buried, and the charge we’d placed probably rolled it and pushed it down instead of blowing it up.

Can you remember much of what happened next?

I was conscious throughout the whole thing. Initially, I thought it was my mate who had stood on the mine, but then I tried to get up and realised I couldn’t. I still had my left foot, but it was badly damaged, and I also had injuries to my right leg. My mate was coming to help me, but I told him to go back and get a mine detector first.

It sounds like it was touch and go...

It was. The drugs for the pain didn’t work and they couldn’t get fluids in me – I lost a lot of blood. Eventually, they got me to a hospital, and there was an argument about whether they should amputate my right leg. A doctor was saying they should, but my Lebanese medic argued it could be saved. He was right. I was taken to a



Orcas hunting seals around the coast of South Nesting Bay, which is overlooked by Kev's house



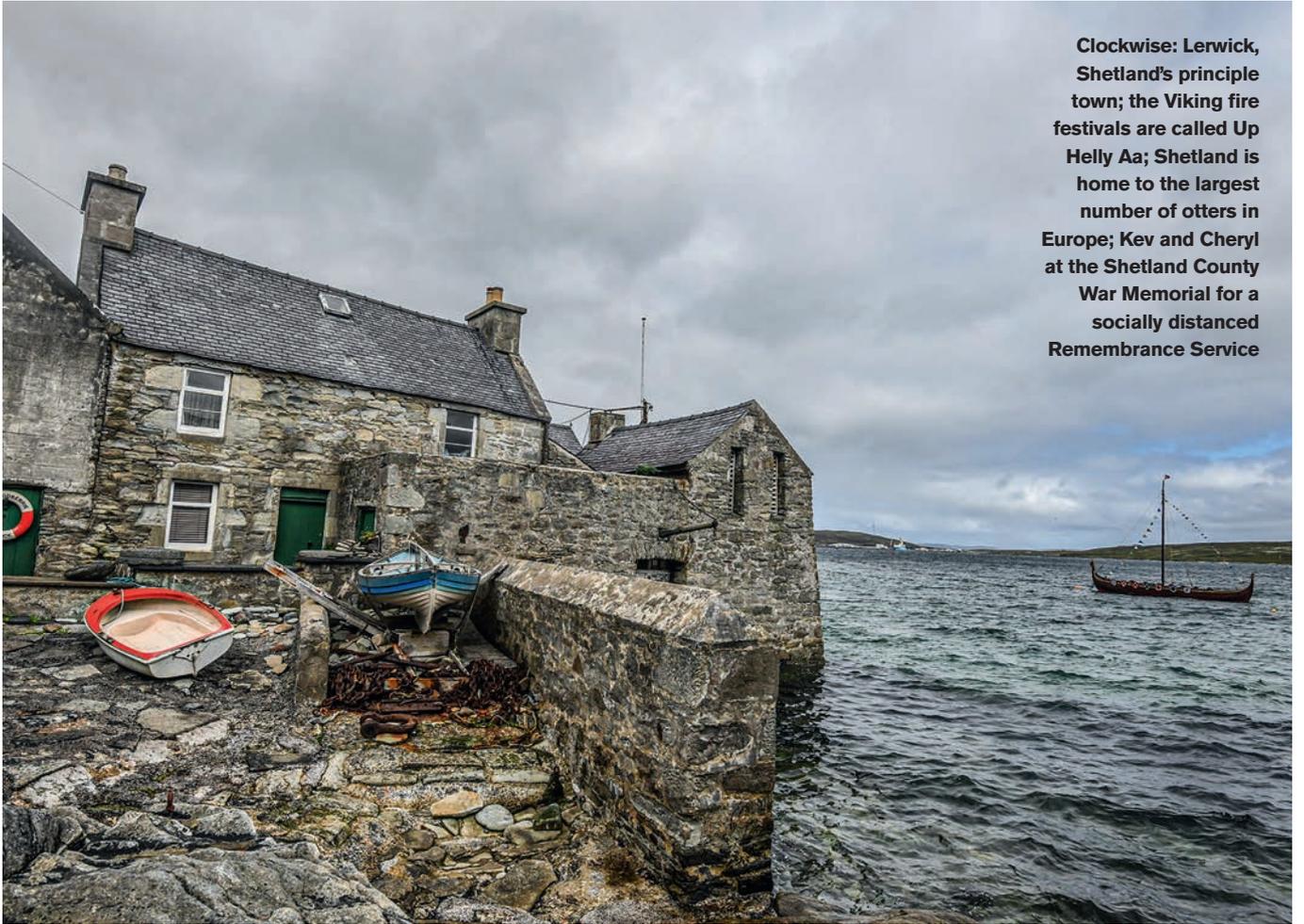
**“WE OVERLOOK
THE OCEAN FROM
OUR HOUSE, AND
WE CAN SEE WHALES,
ORCAS, DOLPHINS,
AND PORPOISES”**



“This is at Eshaness. In violent winter storms the North Atlantic will send spray over these 100ft-high cliffs and will even deposit rocks inland,” says Kev



Clockwise: Lerwick, Shetland's principle town; the Viking fire festivals are called Up Helly Aa; Shetland is home to the largest number of otters in Europe; Kev and Cheryl at the Shetland County War Memorial for a socially distanced Remembrance Service



different hospital and was on the operating table for 15 hours. I lost my left leg below the knee and was in hospital for a month having skin grafts before I was finally flown home.

How was your rehab back at home?

Good. I went into hospital for three-and-a-half weeks, did physio every day, got fit, and was able to walk out using a prosthetic leg seven weeks to the day after the injury. I've been pretty mobile since, with the odd wobble. I consider myself lucky.

And you continued to globe trot...

Yes. In 2004 I spent some time on a Native American reservation in Canada, advising them about clearing ordnance. After that, I joined Handicap International as their senior technical advisor for mine clearance programmes in places like Afghanistan, Congo and Laos. Later, a job came up clearing minefields in the Falklands and I did six months as operations manager. All the mines have been cleared from the islands now, and I'm pleased and proud to have played a part in that.

What took you to Shetland?

Cheryl had a job opportunity in Lerwick and went to have a look. When she came back she told me I had to go up there – she said I'd love it. Terrain-wise, it's very similar to the Falklands, and I did fall in love with the place. We started to come up three or four times a year, and in 2010 she got offered a permanent job, so we moved.

What do you love about the place?

The remoteness, the terrain, the wildlife... I'm amazed at the really rare birds that drop in here on migration. We overlook the ocean from our house, and we can see whales, orcas, dolphins, porpoises... It's an interesting place, too – some locals consider themselves more Norse than Scottish, and we're north of Stockholm, Oslo and Helsinki. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, but it's not always easy. The north-easterly winds can blow at more than 100mph – rocking the house and sometimes lasting a couple of weeks!

And you're involved with Blesma...

I have been able to do a lot with Blesma, the Association has been fantastic to me. I've been to Twickenham to see several England internationals, I've taken part in Remembrance Day Parades, I've been white-water rafting in Colorado and scuba diving in the Red Sea, and I went to Iceland with the photography group.

“THE MINES HAVE ALL BEEN CLEARED NOW FROM THE FALKLANDS, AND I’M PLEASED TO HAVE PLAYED A PART IN THAT”

Blesma photography is something you're heavily involved with, isn't it?

Yes. In 2018 I assisted with a photography course in the Lake District, and in 2019 I ran a group here on Shetland for a week. We'll hopefully be able to do more soon. I think coming to a place like this brings joy and comfort. Most people from the rest of the UK haven't seen anything like it.

How has the photography group stayed in touch during lockdown?

I run a Zoom meeting for the Association's photographers in Scotland every other week. We talk about all sorts, not just photography,

and that has helped me a lot. I look forward to talking to like-minded people, and we set ourselves photography challenges, too.

And you're involved with the local Army Cadet Force...

I work for the Army Cadet Force (ACF) as an admin assistant. I'm also an adult volunteer in the Cadets, and my wife is an ACF officer. We teach the cadets a variety of military and community skills. I love to see the kids progress; they come in sometimes with maybe a few difficulties, but several years later they're confident teenagers.

And you've overcome cancer, too...

In 2016 I was diagnosed with oral cavity cancer. It started with a loose tooth. I was 57 and I'd never had a tooth out before, which I thought wasn't bad, but an x-ray revealed quite a large tumour, and I ended up having a 16-hour operation less than a week after diagnosis. They had to cut off half my face to get at the thing, then rebuild me! I was lucky, because it could have spread to my tongue or brain. Thankfully, I've been all clear ever since.

Get to know: photography

Photography is a popular pastime with Members. Here are a few basic tips, tricks and techniques that you can practise until the Association is able to run its wide range of popular photography courses once again

LIGHTING, CAMERA, ACTION

You might think that strong sunshine would work well but direct sunlight produces harsh shadows. Use soft, flat, natural light wherever possible. The 'golden hour' is shortly after sunrise and shortly before sunset.

STICK TO THE RULE OF THIRDS

Composition is how the elements of a photograph are arranged. Split your picture into thirds with two evenly spaced imaginary vertical and horizontal lines. Now place the focus of your picture where any two of these lines cross.

KEEP A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

Photographing something straight on can be a bit obvious. Sometimes changing your elevation, angle or distance can instantly make your photograph better.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The best way to improve your picture-taking skills is to... take lots of pictures. It is definitely worth taking pictures at



night and in harsh light, as well as in perfect conditions, to see how different situations affect the final image. It will all help with the theory and get you familiar with your camera. So whether you're on the High Street or at home, start snapping!

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND

A DEVICE DESIGNED TO BE USED BY ASTRONAUTS COULD HELP AMPUTEES INCREASE BONE DENSITY AND MUSCLE MASS. BLESMA'S LEE SPENCER JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO TRY IT OUT

Rehabilitation programmes for limbless and injured veterans could be revolutionised by an exercise machine that was originally designed to be used by astronauts on the International Space Station. The ingenious device, known as HIFIm, has been designed to enable astronauts to efficiently ward off the problems of low bone density and muscle loss that occur in space.

But the device could be effective when used in rehabilitation routines for amputees as its design helps apply controllable loads and impact forces for exercises such as squat jumps and leg presses.

Blesma Member Lee Spencer (right), who was part of Row2Recovery's all-Blesma TransAtlantic rowing team in 2016, has described it as a "cracking piece of equipment" after putting it through a series of trials. The former Royal Marine Colour Sergeant, who is in training for a series of gruelling physical challenges, has been testing the High Frequency Impulse for Microgravity (HIFIm) prototype.

"I can see it having a great place in exercise programmes as it allows you to do squat jumps



John Kennett devised the HIFm in his pilates studio and hopes it will be used on Earth as well as in space



Words: Danny Buckland. Photography: Andy Bate



Jumping develops bone density and muscle mass, but is something that astronauts and lower limb amputees find difficult to do



which, as an amputee, are very difficult and can cause stress to travel through the stump,” says Lee, who has set multiple rowing records in the last few years. “It gives a good cardiovascular workout too, so I’m keen to see the machine progressing and providing a great opportunity for amputee veterans.”

AMPUTEES AND ASTRONAUTS

HIFIm was devised in a pilates studio by sports exercise specialist John Kennett (above) with the help of a British special effects company that won an Oscar for its work on the blockbuster WWI film *1917*.

Users lie down on the machine with their feet positioned on a metal jump board and their torso on an independent, padded carriage. They then squat or jump, causing the carriage and jump board to move apart from each other before springs between them return both to their starting positions.

Astronauts currently exercise two hours a day, six days a week during their stay in space but can still lose 10 per cent of their bone density during a six-month mission because of the effects of microgravity. The action of jumping helps develop the user’s bone and

Lee puts HIFIm through its paces

Since he was injured seven years ago, former Royal Marine Lee Spencer has dedicated his life to physical challenges, raising large sums of money for military charities along the way

Lee, who completed three operational tours in Afghanistan during 24 years of service, lost his right leg when he was hit by debris from a car crash while he was helping a stranded motorist in 2014. Two years later, the 51 year old was part of an all-Blesma Row2Recovery crew who became the first all- amputee crew to row across the Atlantic. Lee then went on to become the first physically disabled person to row solo and unsupported from mainland Europe to South America, smashing the existing record by 36 days. It was the longest solo and unsupported ocean row by a physically disabled person, and a testimony to his courage and fitness.

Lee recently completed a sponsored walk of the UK’s Three Peaks in three days and is now in training for the Triathlon of Great Britain which involves swimming the English Channel, cycling from Land’s End to John O’Groats, and climbing the UK’s three highest peaks.

How do you think the HIFIm could help amputees?

It is effective at building up muscle and bone density, which are things that go after you lose a leg. John says the machine needs to go through more clinical trials, but it definitely gives that explosive jumping action that no other piece of equipment I’ve seen can offer. I was really impressed with it.

How does it work?

It is basically a leg press but uses springs instead of wires. You squat down then jump up. When you get a feel for the mechanism, you can replicate standing squat jumps, which is not easy when you’ve lost a leg. It helps you develop those fast twitch muscles from the explosive jumping, and you can change the settings so it is versatile for all abilities.

How did you feel after the session?

It didn’t put much strain or stress on my stump, and that is an obvious weak point for any amputee. It certainly had me blowing after a few minutes, so I can see it having a positive impact on cardiovascular health. The impact on bone density could be a game changer for amputees, and that is really important as we tend to focus on our muscles rather than our bone health.

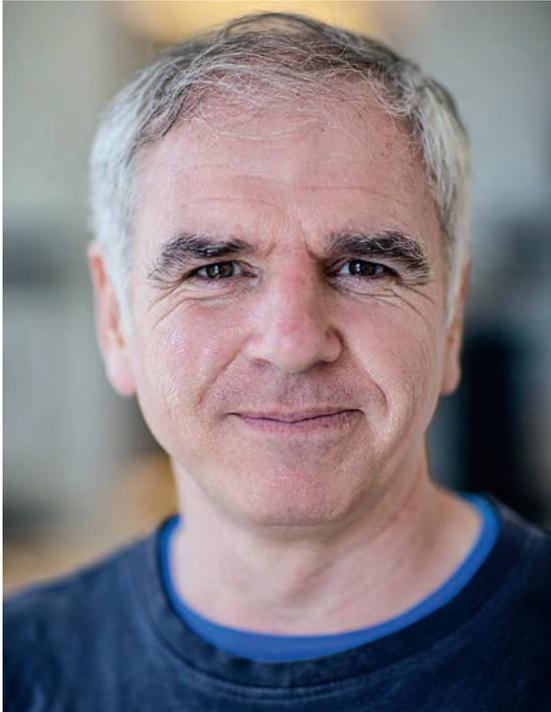
What are the next steps?

It would be good to work out with some telemetry equipment so that they could measure exactly what is happening to the body and then use that data. It would be great to see the device succeed and become a tool that can help amputees at all stages of their rehabilitation.



**“IT DEFINITELY GIVES
THAT EXPLOSIVE JUMPING
ACTION THAT NO OTHER
PIECE OF EQUIPMENT
I’VE SEEN CAN OFFER”**





muscle mass safely during intense exercise routines, while the HIFIm's use of isolation springs and moving carriages absorb the forces of repeated jumping that would otherwise be transmitted to the spacecraft.

"An astronaut's current exercise schedule takes up valuable research time. My machine could cut that time to just 10 minutes a day, which would have a game-changing impact on their work, fitness and recovery," says John, who worked as an engineer on aeroplanes including Concorde and 747s before retraining as a sports therapist and injury rehab specialist.

"The physiological changes caused by living without gravity can be significant and include lengthening of the spine, changes in the shape of the heart, blood and fluid travelling upwards to the face causing puffy features, reduced sense of smell and taste, and eye defects, as well as bone density loss. Some astronauts can take up to four years to recover.

"Research has shown that jumping vastly improves muscle and bone density, but the machines currently on the Space Station cannot be used for that. The HIFIm will take up less space and weigh less than the existing machines, and would give astronauts a more complete workout in a much shorter time."

SPACE IS NOT THE FINAL FRONTIER

Fortunately for Blesma Members, the equipment is geared up for use on Earth as well as in space. "It could allow amputees to experience a dosage of exercise and load in a very safe way so we can gradually improve their muscle mass and preserve bone density," explains John. "By talking to Lee and letting him experience the HIFIm, we're hoping to demonstrate that we can gradually increase the loading with less likelihood of an injury at the stump.

"A lot of pressure goes through that critical contact point when using exercise machines in the gym or even



when walking because of the ground reaction forces between stump and prosthetic. Lee hadn't jumped since his accident seven years ago and experienced nothing like it during his rehabilitation. It was great to have him trial the equipment and get his feedback, and we are continuing to work with him.

"The equipment has been designed to be light and transportable, and to fit into small spaces – hence the attraction to the Space Station – but it could have use on military bases in conflict zones and naval vessels, where space is at a premium."

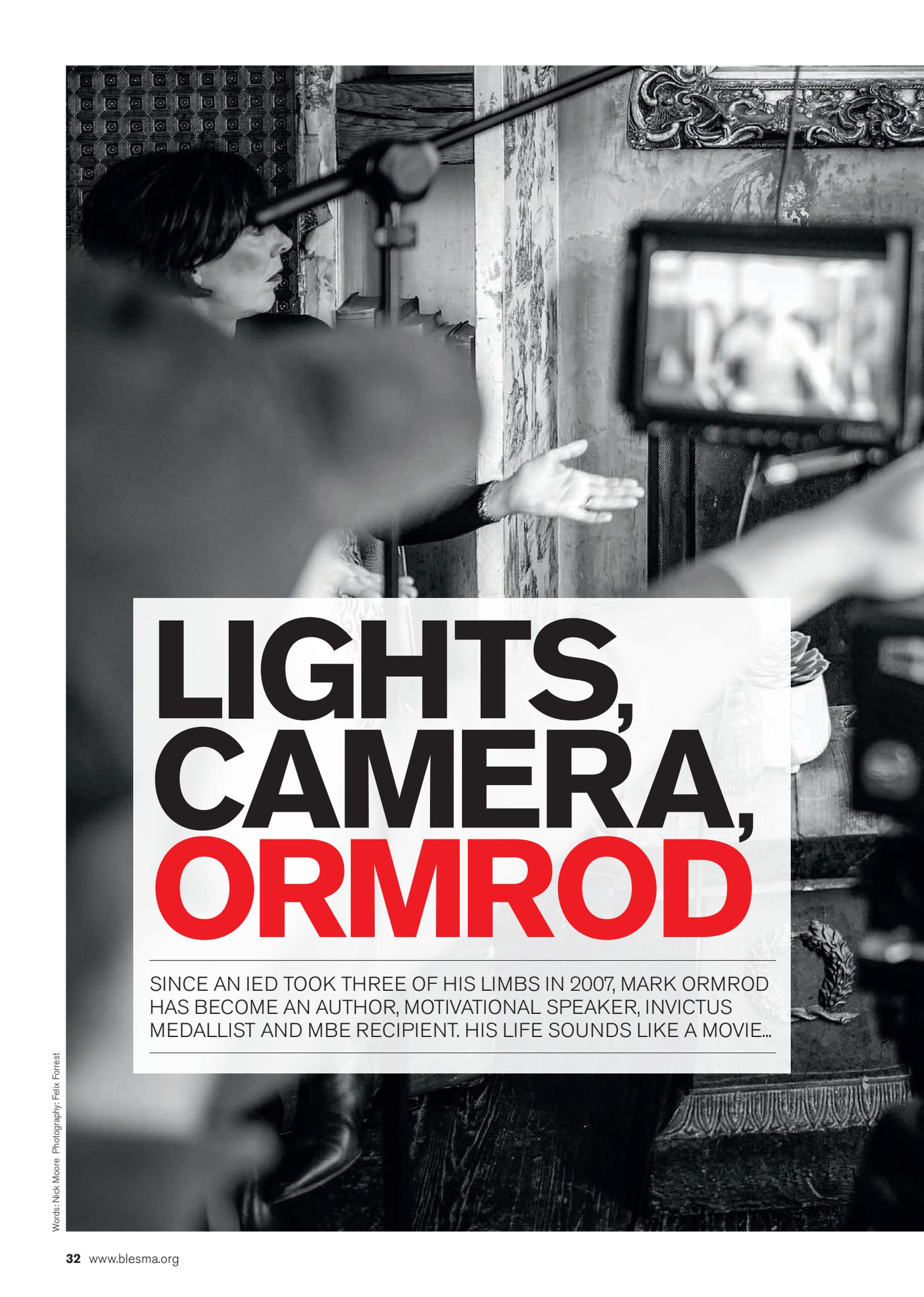
John initially had the idea for HIFIm after treating a client who had low bone density after recovering from breast cancer. "I worked from the proverbial garden shed to repurpose existing equipment and developed a programme of jumping for my client to follow. After a year of weekly sessions, her overall bone density had increased by eight per cent," says John, "and although it was not a clinical trial, the results couldn't be ignored."

John is now researching the HIFIm in collaboration with St Mary's University, Twickenham, and has the backing of both the UK Space Agency and the European Space Agency, which is planning zero gravity flights later this year to test the system.

The device could also have further benefits, such as in treating osteoporosis patients who suffer deteriorating bone density that can lead to falls and fractures. Some three million people in the UK suffer from the condition, and the NHS spends around £4.5 billion annually helping the 500,000 patients who need hospital treatment for fragility fractures.

The device will need an extensive range of trials and clinical validation before it can be approved for public use, but John hopes its fast-paced progress will continue to provide a brand new form of exercise – both on Earth and in space.

Opposite page: Lee puts the HIFIm through its paces under John's watchful eye, and was able to jump for the first time in seven years



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ORMROD

SINCE AN IED TOOK THREE OF HIS LIMBS IN 2007, MARK ORMROD HAS BECOME AN AUTHOR, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, INVICTUS MEDALLIST AND MBE RECIPIENT. HIS LIFE SOUNDS LIKE A MOVIE...



Mark became the first triple amputee to survive the conflict in Afghanistan when he was blown up serving with the Royal Marines on Christmas Eve 2007



“He was so charismatic, everybody was locked into his enthusiasm,” say husband-and-wife film team Lynn and David Coleman

Mark Ormrod is perhaps one of Blesma’s most recognisable Members. He became the first triple amputee to survive the conflict in Afghanistan when he was blown up while on a foot patrol in Helmand with the Royal Marines on Christmas Eve 2007. The father of three, who lost both his legs as well as his right arm in the blast, was told he wouldn’t walk again but defied the odds to do just that to receive his operational medal a year later.

What has followed since has been just as impressive: Mark is now a celebrated author and motivational speaker, a tireless charity fundraiser, has won Invictus Games medals and has been awarded an MBE. As a Blesma Member he has taken part in Making Generation R, recorded an episode of *The Resilience Sessions* podcast, and given up his time to fundraise for the Association.

Part of Mark’s life story has already been told in his acclaimed biography *Man Down*, and he has lost count of the number of times people have told him his experiences would ‘make a good film’. Now, that looks like it is finally about to happen thanks to husband-and-wife film production team

Lynn and David Coleman (above) – even if they were initially met with indifference from Mark.

“I must admit, I was perhaps a bit rude to David and Lynn at first because when they started emailing me, I just ignored them,” says Mark. “I’d heard it all before, and a lot of people were promising me stuff that would lead to nothing. But then the chief executive of The Royal Marines Charity got in touch and said: ‘Can you please reply because this is legit?’ I did, and things went from there.”

The producers have a background in the City – David in banking, Lynn at Lloyds of London – and came to see the film as a commercial and development opportunity for their company, DAL Productions.

AN INCREDIBLE STORY

“When we picked up Mark’s book we thought his was an incredible story,” says David. “Then we saw him doing a presentation, and he was just so charismatic. Everybody was locked into his enthusiasm. His is a unique tale, and the way he lives his life is remarkable. We thought it would be exciting to share that with the wider

world. With our commercial knowledge and financial background, we thought there could be a synergy.”

They have been working with Mark to develop the concept ever since. “We are excited about making Mark’s story into a movie, although we keep joking that it’s going to be five hours long because he keeps doing amazing things,” says David.

The duo have since added renowned producer Paul Forrest (above right) to the team to bring discipline to the story. With such an unusual narrative – battlefield action, life-threatening injury, medical dramas, recovery, setbacks, and a journey towards a new life, this is no small job.

“I’ve helped the guys get their heads around what needs to be done to turn this into a film,” says Paul. “When I first met Mark, I realised this was a story that was going to be brutally honest and very difficult to tell. It needs to be regarded as authentic by Mark’s peers. It’s not just a battlefield drama, it’s also a medical drama in which you need authenticity.

“And we need the film to progress through many different stages of Mark’s life and rehabilitation. We don’t want



“When I first met Mark, I realised this was a story that was going to be brutally honest and difficult to tell,” says film producer Paul Forrest

a sudden transition from Mark losing his limbs to him suddenly moving around really well. We want to communicate some of the dark things that Mark had to think about. There will be discomfort. It’s not a straight curve where everything just gets better all the time.”

THE SECRET SAUCE

Visual effects and cinematic trickery will play a part in conveying Mark’s physique on camera: but some top-grade acting will also be required from a performer who can portray Mark during his time in The Marines as well as living as a triple amputee.

“We will be working with a movement expert, who can coach the actor about how Mark moves,” says Paul, “and we will shoot a lot of the footage with a careful balance of object tracking and green screen. You can also frame shots in a certain way so you might not need effects. It’s all about putting the right team of creative people together.”

Funding isn’t easy for any film, and even those that aren’t ‘big budget’ are still very expensive. “It’s all about getting investors in,” says Paul. “We’ve had a lot of interest.

One of the early investors is a US Marine, and he understands the domain we’re operating in. He feels that Mark’s is a story that should be told because too much of what you see in this genre is ‘shoot ‘em up’. This is a story about a catastrophic set of events that changed someone’s life, and the lives of those around him, forever.”

The film, explains Paul, has a unique funding model. He will not take payment until the investors have been paid and certain charities have got the percentages that they’ve been promised. “This was one of the ways we showed Mark we weren’t trying to catch him out,” says Paul.

After a screenwriter and production team have come together, the next step is casting and actually making the film. “Filmmaking requires a big collection of freelancers,” explains Paul. “We are hoping to shoot the Middle East scenes in either Jordan or Morocco. In an ideal world, we’ll be shooting at the beginning of 2022 and maybe looking at a Christmas 2022 release. This is actually a Christmas film because Mark was injured on Christmas Eve.”

As for casting Mark, Lynn says that “we need an actor who thinks: ‘this is going to

be a great role for me’, and who takes on board how Mark would like to see the role being portrayed. That’s the secret sauce.” The man himself is “100% involved with the process” of casting, says Paul. “We’ve got some ideas and we are going to run them all past him. He will be very connected with the final choices. He is not going to be an associate producer in name only – we’re using this experience as a method of skills transfer to get him up to speed on what producers do.

“He will be actively involved and taking on responsibility, so he’ll have a new skill set that he can work with beyond this film.”

There is a lot of hard work ahead for everybody involved but, for Paul, the sky’s the limit. “For an actor, playing somebody with a disability is hard to do well,” he says. “This role will be a tough one to pull off because of the mental and physical challenges that Mark has faced over the years, and not least because of his enduring charisma.”

Like everything else in Mark Ormrod’s life, however, you wouldn’t bet against something remarkable happening. The red carpet awaits...

“We need to leave now, before we get mobbed!”

SHOCK, TEARS, LAUGHTER... MARK ENVISAGES THE END RESULT BEING A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE OF A FILM – IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT HIS IS A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE OF A LIFE

The film has been born from your book, *Man Down*. What was it like writing that? I enjoyed it. The experience was cathartic – talking and telling stories. But it took 10 months, which was a lot longer than I thought it would take. I had a ghost writer to help me, and by the time we’d finished I was burned out and didn’t even read the book! I eventually read it 10 years later. I would change one or two things about it now, but when we wrote it I was still serving. The feedback has been really positive, though. It’s something I’m proud of, but the book isn’t the half of it.

The real story starts when I finished serving, went to America and got rehab and mentoring. That’s when my life really started to take a new turn. **What’s it like being an associate producer on a film about your life?** I’m excited about the whole thing. We are hitting the ground running after Covid, and I’ve already learned so much about filmmaking. It blows me away how much is actually involved in making a film. It takes hundreds of people in so many different areas; from writing the screenplay to putting up the scaffolding

for the sets. I’ve learned about all the work that goes on behind the scenes. **What is your key role?** I’m going to be irritating everyone! I’m fortunate to be involved as an associate producer, so I’ll be there from the very beginning, putting my two pence in and making sure the film is as authentic as it possibly can be. **What are your hopes for the film? Is it about getting across a certain message?** I’m hoping for three Oscars and 15 BAFTAs! Just joking! I’d like the feedback to be similar to the book’s. People would email me to say how much it meant to them.



Training for Invictus Games selection in 2017

I want to open people’s eyes, so there will be shock, people will think: ‘God, that’s awful’, people will be welling up, others will be covering their eyes but then also laughing at all the dark humour. I want it to be a rollercoaster ride but for it to end on a high. **Who would you like to play you?** We need an actor who can play someone quite young because I was 24 when I was injured. Actors like Jack Reynor from *Transformers*, Jack O’Connell and Kit Harington are great examples. I’d also like some big-name cameos. **How odd will it be to see your life being played out by someone else?** I think by the time we finish filming it will feel normal to me, but sitting in a cinema watching it with a crowd of people will be special. I want it to be like the Bruce Lee scene where he’s watching his first film, and at the end it goes quiet and he says: “We need to leave now, before we get mobbed!” – with everyone in shock because it’s so good. That would be nice.

“I WANT TO OPEN PEOPLE’S EYES BUT END ON A HIGH. SITTING IN A CINEMA WATCHING IT WITH A CROWD OF PEOPLE WILL BE SPECIAL”



As an associate producer on the film, Mark fully intends to be heavily involved in the project right from the very start

How to... Start gaming with the Association

IF YOUR IDEA OF COMPUTER GAMES IS SOMEONE PLAYING PAC-MAN ON THEIR OWN YOU NEED TO THINK AGAIN. GAMING HAS GOT HI-TECH – AND SOCIABLE

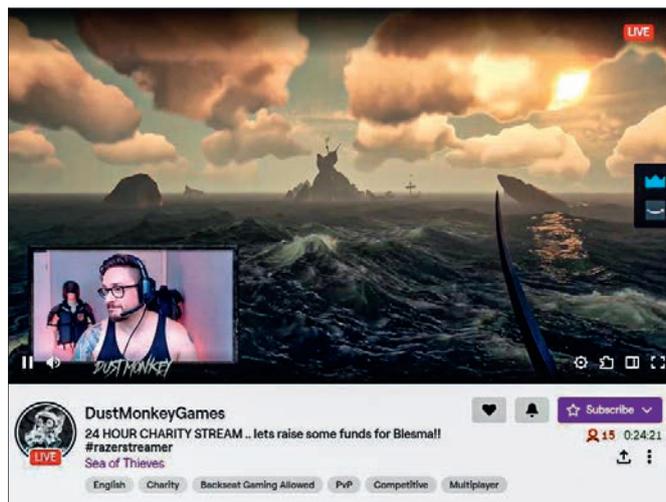


Video games have been hugely popular ever since the bygone days of the arcade machine, but things have come a long way since then. Online gaming is growing exponentially, and huge communities now form to play online games such as *Call of Duty* and *World of Warcraft*. It is not uncommon for Army barracks to have their own consoles, and there are several E-sports (competitive gaming) teams representing different regiments and branches of the military.

Whereas in the past, dedicated gamers were often depicted as solitary shut-ins, nowadays veterans are finding rich communities and forming life-long friendships through gaming. Video games have hit the mainstream, and in the same way that people have always followed football teams, dedicated fans now follow pro-gamers, too.

We spoke to several members of Blesma's E-sports team to get their top tips on how to get gaming with Blesma...

1 CHOOSE THE RIGHT DEVICE
When you start out, choosing a console will depend on a number of factors; your budget, the games you most enjoy, and how competitive you want to become. Whatever you choose, there is a range of adaptive controllers on the market which work for almost all disabilities.



Clockwise from above: Blesma supporter Callum Walker ran the first Game On For Blesma fundraiser; Lionel O'Connor (above right) and Dan Bingley (right) are two of Blesma's hot-shot gamers

“Every year, Microsoft and PlayStation bring out new consoles and generally the fans are loyal,” says Member and gamer Jack Cummings. “The different platforms have different flagship games, so it’s worth working out which ones you’d most like to play. For those with the budget, and if you want to play top-level competitive gaming, I’ve found PC to be a good move.”

2 REACH OUT
One of the main ways in which gaming has transformed over the last few decades is that avid gamers now connect with each other to

play online. These growing communities support one another, whether it’s with tips, tricks and techniques to beat that taxing level, or with the lowdown on the best place to buy a new headset.

“When I first started gaming I didn’t know anyone, but I picked up the controller and gave it a go,” says Member Lionel O’Connor. “I quickly made a friend, and I’ve been playing with him for 15 years now, even though we’ve never met! That’s the benefit of Blesma being involved in gaming – as a Member you have a ready-made pool of people who will be up for playing matches.”



3 STREAMING

Streaming is another important feature of the modern gaming landscape. Twitch allows you to broadcast yourself playing games. It is free to join and watch, you can chat to the people who are gaming, and even donate to channels. This is why it's great for charities like Blesma, as it is possible to fundraise through the platform or ask for donations as you play. It's also a great way to get better at gaming, as you can get tips from the pros and others who are watching.

Not all gamers choose to stream, and you don't need to stream to be part of Blesma's gaming community, but if this is of interest you can follow Blesma on Twitch at <https://www.twitch.tv/gameonforblesma>

4 IT'S ONLY A GAME!

Though it's only natural that games can get competitive, ultimately they are a great way for Members to connect. For Team Blesma, it's not about how good you are or where the Association places in tournaments, it's about working together, having fun, and reigniting that classic military banter.

"I love the banter and getting to know other Members," says Jack. "I've met Members through gaming who I would never have otherwise come into contact with. It's just another place to talk and share, we talk about all kinds of stuff?"



5 BLESMA E-SPORTS

If you are into gaming and like the idea of representing Blesma in tournaments and matches, why not join the Association's E-sports team? The team use Discord to stay in contact (see panel, right), and are always looking for new players.

To sign up, simply register with the Activities Team at the link below, you will then be verified as a Member so you can access the E-sports team channels and start interacting with your teammates. Anyone is welcome to join, no matter their skill level. Selection for matches and tournaments takes place for each event to ensure everyone gets the chance to represent the Association.

Register with the Activities Team at <https://blesma.org/gaming> or through the Blesma Connects app

What on earth is Discord?

Blesma's gamers, whether they are Members, staff or fundraisers, stay in touch using Discord – an app that allows gamers to find online opponents. It is used much like other communication apps, such as Whatsapp, and can be used on a desktop or on mobile.

The idea of Discord is that each private 'server' (such as the Blesma Server) contains different 'channels' (or topics). For example, you might have an Xbox channel, or a *Call of Duty* channel. Those who are a part of that server can choose which channels to join. There are also separate channels which can only be accessed by those with permission. The app can appear complex at first glance, but it's a powerful communication tool.

"As long as you have Discord you can talk to people and organise games," says Blesma gamer Dan Bingley. "For me, the more Members we have in the Discord the more things you'll find you have in common. It looks a little technical at first, but once you get used to it it's a great way to stay connected, and there are lots of Members on there to help with any questions you might have."

Words: Izzy Perks

Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report 2020

Every year, the Association must publish an annual report alongside a set of financial statements. Below is an abridged version of the most recent report

Blesma entered 2020 in a strong position, bolstered by healthy income streams (including the sale of the previous head office) and an ambitious Activities Programme. At the beginning of the year, the Association ran overseas and national events as well as a number of outreach activities. In March, however, the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic began to be felt, and the country entered the first period of lockdown.

Blesma's reaction was swift. The Association transitioned to working from home, and our Support and Outreach Officers and welfare volunteers quickly established contact with Members to confirm they were safe and able to deal with the effects of the crisis.

Face-to-face activities were halted, and a programme of virtual events, many enabled by Members, took shape. The Making Generation R programme switched from presenting in schools to delivering digitally and reached significant audiences through *The Resilience Sessions* podcasts. Our fundraisers switched focus onto those areas that were best able to continue in the new environment, whilst our Communications Team kept Members informed.

As the crisis developed, Members stepped up to help other Members, with many

volunteering in their Branches and local communities. Our Support and Outreach teams maintained contact, provided grants where required, and kept in close touch with the NHS and other providers as services were impacted. A small number of activities were run when government guidelines allowed, and we all began to speculate on when the 'new normal' would begin.

During 2020, some 142 new Members were welcomed into the Association. Sadly, we also lost 227 Members, including some to Covid. We feel their loss deeply and our thoughts are with their families and friends.

Although Blesma's strategy remains extant, the COVID-19 crisis is continuing to significantly affect the environment in which the charity operates and plans for the future. However, the Association remains steadfast in its determination to be there for its Members, through life.

Security

In a year of unprecedented challenges our nine Area Support Officers, reinforced by a body of welfare volunteers and 10 Outreach Officers, delivered Blesma's comprehensive 'Welfare Service' and remained the main source of information regarding how our Members fared during the year.

Lockdown measures in March 2020 led to face-to-face welfare delivery to Members

moving to a remote model of provision via online and telephone contact by Support Officers, and to a transition from face-to-face local activities provided by Outreach Officers to online and 'at home' activities.

The Independence and Wellbeing Team in head office transitioned to remote working, with all administrative and delivery support functions moving online. Staff responsibilities were adjusted where necessary to facilitate uninterrupted support to Members.

As the country moved into lockdown, Blesma Support Officers, supported by Outreach Officers, carried out checks on all Members to establish a baseline of need and identify those at risk. Physical visits were replaced by telephone and video calls in all but 'crisis' cases, where Support Officers conducted risk-managed personal visits where necessary.

Throughout the year, contact was maintained in this way, as well as through online activities. Although the majority of Members did not require immediate assistance, feedback suggested that Members were grateful for the continuing contact. Some of the actions that emerged from these contacts proved challenging due to partners and other agencies not operating at pre-Covid levels. However, Support Officers persevered and worked to mitigate delays in services. Blesma's



Support in the time of Covid

In March 2020, the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic began to be felt. Blesma's reaction was swift. Support and Outreach Officers, helped by welfare volunteers, quickly established contact with Members to confirm they were safe and able to deal with the effects of the crisis. Face-to-face activities were halted as a programme of virtual events took shape. As the crisis went on, Members stepped up to help other Members, and many volunteered in their communities.



Support Officer (Prosthetics) played a key role as his role refocused to working with Limb Centres to help reassure and inform prosthetic service users of any changes to services during COVID-19.

The importance of the Outreach Programme in reducing isolation was underlined during 2020 as Outreach Officers delivered face-to-face activities when government guidelines permitted. More importantly, they devised and implemented a varied programme of virtual activities to connect Members with each other, and to Blesma's wider network.

Blesma has come to value the close working relationship with Veterans UK as Support Officers work to resolve War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme issues for individual Members. This aspect of support was particularly challenging in 2020 as the pandemic caused Veterans UK staff to move to remote working and delivery of helpline support moved online for a period.

Blesma's work with the Defence Recovery Capability was impacted as visits to Members in the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Stanford Hall and in Personnel Recovery Centres were limited.

In 2020, our work to observe and monitor developments in prosthetic provision to our Members across the UK was focused primarily on working at an individual level, advocating for those Members who required support locally at the NHS Limb Centres. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the capacity of the Limb Services as staff were redeployed or furloughed, and services were directed at those most in need, including new amputees and children. BSO (Prosthetics) was instrumental in enabling Members to access these reduced services and resolve issues.

For those with Service attributable amputations, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel (VPP) continued to provide an excellent process for the funding of components in England. Eligible Members

living in the devolved administrations have similar access to state-of-the-art prosthetics via slightly differing national care pathways.

Blesma remained involved in the NHS England Prosthetic Service Review and we continued to monitor the support to Members referred to the Complex Prosthetics Clinic at DMRC for the management of complicated prosthetic issues, and into the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) in England.

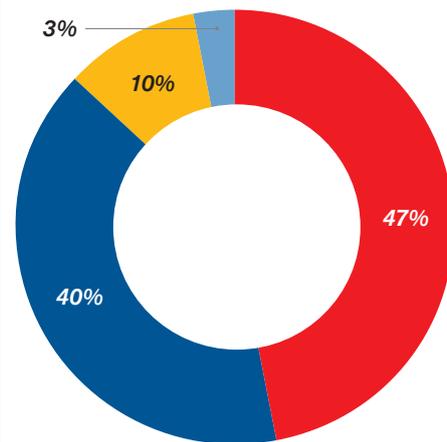
BSOs continued to support individual Members who wish to claim War Pensions, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Awards and DWP benefits, including representing them at hearings and tribunals. However, work in this area was impacted by the pandemic as tribunals were paused before resuming towards the latter part of the year by telephone conference calls rather than face to face.

This caused significant issues for Members, but Support Officers worked hard to ensure that Members were supported and kept informed throughout the process. Blesma continues to engage with the DWP and delivery partners, highlighting issues affecting veterans. This includes monitoring changes to existing policy which may disadvantage veterans who are in receipt of disability benefits as the result of attributable injuries. We also continued to work with the Scottish Parliament on the Scottish Social Security Review.

Blesma remains committed to providing individually tailored, timely and effective support to Members in their own homes to enable them to retain their independence for as long as possible, whilst reinforcing our support to Members' carers and their families. However, the enforced change to our delivery model, driven by the pandemic, reduced our ability to engage with Members at home or to involve families in local activities.

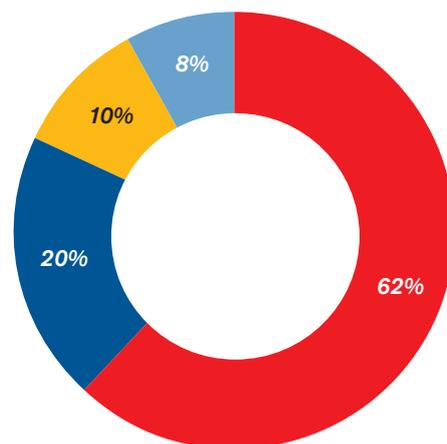
Our support to Members has now moved further towards a bespoke service to meet individual Members' needs. In the last

INCOME



Legacy	47%
Donations & Grants	40%
Investment	10%
Other	3%

STAFF, ATTRIBUTABLE AND GOVERNANCE COSTS (apportionment)



Membership Services	62%
Fundraising	20%
Awareness & Representation	10%
Activities	8%



12 months this has included provision of disability and mobility aids such as life-lines, stair lifts, bathroom adaptations, wheelchairs, Electrically Powered Vehicles and ramps.

The long-term pressure on Health and Social Care budgets has been exacerbated by the pandemic and increases the threat to service provision both quantitatively and qualitatively. We closely monitor where gaps in support leave our Members vulnerable, and we will continue to step in to meet their needs whilst always holding the State to account where appropriate.

Our LIBOR-funded Outreach Programme became part of Blesma's core delivery when the pilot ended in May, and the Association assumed responsibility for funding. Work to reduce isolation assumed even greater importance throughout 2020 as events were reconfigured for online delivery.

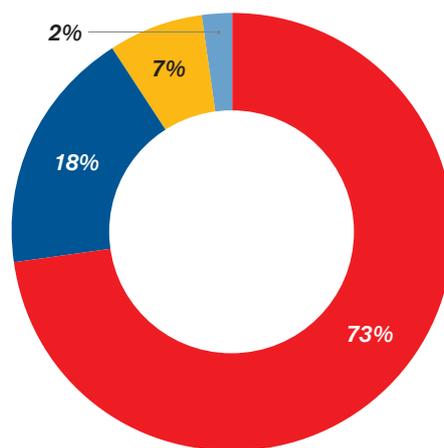
The original bid for LIBOR funding for the Outreach Pilot allowed for one Outreach Officer for each of the Blesma Areas. In the case of BSO (Scotland, NI and RoI), however, concerns that Members living in Scotland could be at increased risk of isolation led to Blesma creating and funding the additional post of Outreach Officer (Scotland) from January 2020. This has proven to be a great success.

Identity

The Activities Team had a successful start to the year, with four international events taking place. Blesma's first-ever families ski event was a great success (see p44). As of March 2020, 55 events were planned. With applications and selection deadlines progressing, the decision was made to adopt a process of a 'rolling' review of events, the intention being to safely conduct activities where Covid restrictions allowed and to delay cancellations as long as practically possible.

As the year progressed, Members were contacted to determine and monitor their

“We will continue to step in to meet Members’ needs whilst holding the State to account where appropriate”

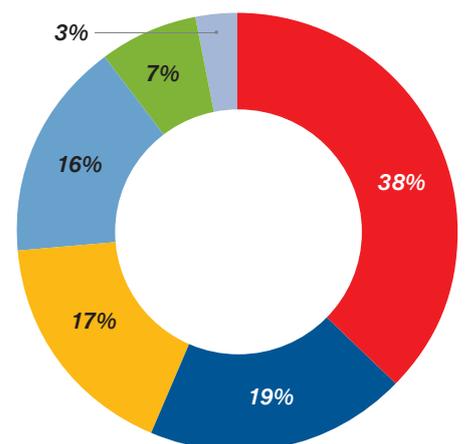


EXPENDITURE

Membership Services	73%
Fundraising	18%
Awareness & Representation	7%
Investment fees	2%

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES EXPENDITURE

Advice & Support	38%
Grants & Assistance	19%
Overheads	17%
Activities	16%
Engagement	7%
Research	3%



**“To hold my wife’s
and my daughter’s
hands as we skied
down the mountain
was incredible”**

CAMMY CAMPBELL



The Campbells' story

Seven families, with 11 children aged from three to 15, took part in Blesma's first family skiing activity in the French Alps in February 2020

Family holidays have never really been complete for veteran Cammy Campbell, whose left leg was amputated in 2009. Cammy had been serving in Iraq in 2003 when he sustained a leg injury that led to a bone in his foot dying. An artificial bone graft proved unsuccessful and, in 2007, he suffered a fused ankle. He returned to service, but damaged his leg further still on a night-time training exercise. It was this incident that led to the amputation of his leg in June 2009.

Over the next decade, Cammy lived in constant pain. He underwent a number of operations, including Deep Brain Stimulation, and was taking a variety of medication in an attempt to combat Phantom Limb Pain that left him feeling as if he was “plugged into the electricity mains all day.

“We are an active family, but my constant pain has been a hindrance. Over the years my social bubble has reduced and my self-confidence – and even my ability to talk – hit rock bottom because I was taking all kinds of medication,” says Cammy. “It was finally all resolved in April 2019 when surgery to amputate my leg above the knee got rid of my phantom pains. If it hadn't been for Blesma, I'd be a crumpled pile of mush somewhere.”

The Winter Sports Families trip last February was Cammy's first real chance to actively take part in something adventurous with his family.

“Cammy was such an active guy when I first met him, so to see how little he was able to do before his last operation was hard,” says Cammy's wife Clare, who served in the RAF for 13 years. “I would even feel guilty when I did something with our daughter, Holly, because Cammy could only watch. I never imagined we'd be doing a skiing trip as a whole family because I had no idea about the specialist equipment available for amputees. It was so special to have Cammy involved for the first time in years.”

A LIFE-CHANGING TRIP

During the week-long trip to La Plagne the Members and their families were split into groups to learn to ski. New friendships were made; something the Campbells have missed over the last few years. On the final day, the families skied together as a group.

“I was so proud to watch Holly learn to ski,” says Cammy. “To hold my wife's and my daughter's hands as we skied down the mountain was incredible. To have had that assistance from Blesma was great. It is like the Association is filling the gap of my missing limb.”

For Clare, it was an adventure she will never forget. “There was a moment when Holly was skiing beside Cammy and he put his hand skis out for her to hold. I got really choked up. Doing a trip like that as a family has been life changing.”

status and, subsequently, events were postponed. As restrictions eased for a limited time, a small number of socially-distanced activities took place. These had to be completely adaptable and formats were changed as the Tier system came into place.

Physical activities were promptly changed to be delivered virtually, with the emphasis on supporting Members' physical and mental wellbeing. Workshops included online fitness sessions that were inclusive for all, breath workshops to help with anxiety and improve wellbeing, and inclusive yoga and pilates workshops.

Online photography courses also proved popular. Members were surveyed for their views on the programme at the end of the year, with the intention to continue virtual activities that connect Blesma Members regardless of where they live.

Connectivity

Maintaining connectivity across the Association is fundamental to Blesma. The Association seeks to represent Members' interests, increase awareness, gain support, and promote wider understanding of the impact of limb loss on Members and families.

Within the Association, strong connections between Members are reinforced through a steady flow of publications, social media output, outreach activities and direct contact. Our advocacy on behalf of Members has continued, with direct input to policy makers and statutory authorities. Blesma maintains close links with other military charities through membership of the executive committee of the Confederation of Service Organisations (Cobseo). The Association continues to be respected as an ‘honest broker’ on behalf of its Members.

The Communications Team saw a significant increase in output during the pandemic, shaping and disseminating the

“To have had that assistance from Blesma is great. It is like they are filling the gap of my missing limb”



Charlie Holford was one of 142 new Members to join the Association in 2020 after his left leg was amputated below the knee in November



messages of individual departments and the Association as a whole as Blesma adjusted its service provision and adapted to ever-changing guidelines and restrictions.

A key requirement was to keep our Members informed as the crisis unfolded. The team connected more closely with Support and Outreach teams, and ensured that Members were kept updated with stories of community, Member-to-Member support, and camaraderie in their regions. The wider staff team used all communication platforms to describe the novel ways in which Blesma responded to the practical, emotional and financial needs of its Members as a result of the crisis.

The Fundraising and Activities Teams saw an increased need for reactive and well-timed communications due to the threat posed to revenue and the requirement to fulfil our Member offer as fully as possible in new circumstances. Those activities and fundraising events that were able to take place were widely publicised and promoted, while the team kept up a steady drumbeat of articles, information and news.

Blesma's Digital Inclusion Programme has hit the ground running and adapted rapidly. The lockdown meant that our organisational goal of tackling isolation amongst the digitally excluded was more urgent than ever. A number of Blesma

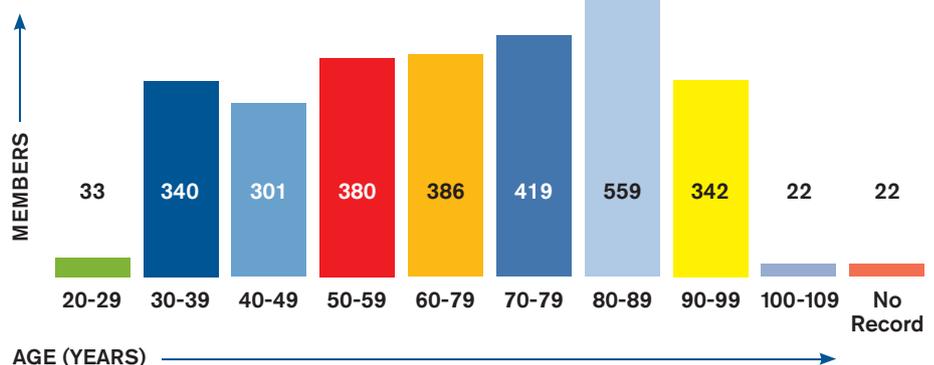
Members were provided with IT to access the internet and enable them to communicate more easily. This was quietly and effectively delivered by the Communications Team, supported by Support and Outreach Officers who provided one-to-one digital training over the phone to Members.

The Blesma Connects app was used to connect Member to Member and to the Association, as well as providing another means for Members to learn about online events and receive updates. Members were surveyed on its use to inform future development.

Blesma Magazine and *Bulletin* continued through the pandemic, with material kept fresh, informative, and appealing at a time when contact between Blesma and its Members was even more essential. Whilst the magazine told the 'Blesma story' to a wide audience of some 30,000 readers, the Bulletin was used to pass key information and specialist advice directly to Members.

The original Making Generation R (MGR) programme planned for 2019/20 was similar to previous years. A five-day training workshop for new presenters and returning Members would be followed

THE AGE OF BLESMA'S MEMBERS
Blesma has a total membership of 2,804



Blesma 2020 in numbers

1,669

Members took part in 174 virtual activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

1,083
Grants paid

256,102

The number of visits to the Blesma website. This is a 48% increase on 2019

13,617

visits, contacts and communications by Support and Outreach Officers

389

Prosthetic interventions

● 142 New Members

by in-person presentations to schools, educational establishments, and a number of NHS and military venues. Blesma and The Drive Project aimed to reach an audience of 20,000 in the 2019/20 academic year. It had reached 71% of this target when schools were closed in March 2020.

The MGR team quickly switched its focus to online activity, delivering a digital resilience training package to a potential audience of 41,000 students and teachers, and conducting live webinars throughout

the crisis. The programme also partnered Blesma Members with well-known personalities to produce *The Resilience Sessions*, a series of podcasts discussing experiences of adversity. Enthusiasm for MGR amongst Blesma Members is still very strong and the 2021 programme is currently oversubscribed.

Blesma continues to pursue local and national media opportunities to report on Members' experiences and achievements in a competitive news environment. Media

coverage in 2020 reflected significant personal achievements such as Member Neil Heritage's ascent of the Matterhorn, as well as the work of individual Member volunteers and the resilience advice delivered by Members and public figures through the MGR programme.

The above is a synopsis taken from the Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report 2020. You can read the full report online at www.blesma.org/annualreport

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF TAI CHI

THE ANCIENT CHINESE PRACTICE OF TAI CHI IS GREAT FOR YOUR FLEXIBILITY, BALANCE AND MOBILITY – ESPECIALLY IF THE COURSE HAS BEEN TAILOR-MADE FOR BLESMA MEMBERS

When it comes to trying new activities, one of the common frustrations for anyone living with an amputation or loss of use of limb is finding an instructor who truly understands – and makes provision for – the special circumstances brought about by their injuries. However, when they're learning from Phil Sheridan, who co-owns Discover Tai Chi with Helen Parsons, that isn't a problem. Phil is an amputee himself, having survived a near-fatal road accident in 2002 that resulted in the amputation of his right leg below the knee.

“I was riding my motorbike and found myself under a 25-ton wagon – on Friday 13th!” he says. “I had to hang in there for what turned out to be a gruesome three hours. My surgeon told me I shouldn't be here.”

Phil's story of recovery is one that many Members will be able to relate to – and he credits his return to a full life (at least in part) to his enduring love of martial arts, especially Tai Chi. The ancient Chinese practice has many forms – some with defensive and fighting qualities like Kung Fu – but it is better known for its slow-moving, flowing style that gives a meditational sense of relaxation and provides numerous health benefits. Tai Chi is also extremely good for improving flexibility, balance and mobility – important for any amputee – but many traditional classes don't cater to those with limb loss or loss of use of limb.

That's why Phil and Helen, who run their business from Keighley in Yorkshire, developed a programme especially for Blesma Members. They're perfectly qualified for the task: Phil teaches at the University



Phil Sheridan and Helen Parsons own Discover Tai Chi and have been teaching Blesma Members via online classes





Tai Chi instructor Phil Sheridan leading a class of non-Blesma Members. The Association's classes ran online in lockdown

of Leeds, has studied martial arts for 37 years, and is an avid powerlifter; Helen is a registered occupational therapist who specialises in sports, health, exercise and nutrition – as well as being an enthusiastic martial artist herself. A number of Members recently signed up for blocks of 30-minute lessons, delivered via Zoom, and the results have already been extremely impressive.

MAINTAINING STABILITY

“After I was injured, I quickly realised the mental challenges I was going to face would be even more significant than the physical ones,” explains Phil. “That was behind the thinking for this course; we wanted to introduce people to Tai Chi’s fluidity and smoothness of movement, and also build in the relaxation elements. Once the Members slowed down and felt what was going on, they said they quickly found it very calming.”

The Members have been taught how to build up a series of movements, adding a new ‘form’ each week and steadily assimilating each move. “We decided to go for half-hour sessions because we didn’t want to overload people,” explains Phil. “One of the more challenging aspects of living with limb loss is maintaining stability. One of the key benefits of Tai

Chi is improving that, but it does come with discomfort and fatigue so you can’t overdo it. Helen and I used our skills as teachers and clinicians to strike a balance between the challenge and the pay-off.

“We explained to Members that the ethos of the sessions would be; ‘let’s explore what we can do’. There was no pressure to perform, and the Blesma Members grasped that right away. They came to the classes with a healthy cynicism but were willing to give it a proper go. I remember from my own time in rehab that doing the work is hard, but I always put in the time that my physios recommended and would do more exercises on my own, too.”

Helen says the fact the Blesma Members already shared a camaraderie and had things in common meant that it was easy to develop a good atmosphere in the classes.

“There was genuine banter and humour, which was really nice and very useful for the classes,” she says. “It meant there was a sense of community in the classroom from the very first session, and that made life easier for Phil and I because we usually have to develop that with a new class.

“We often say that observation is as good as participation when you are starting out, but the Members gave us feedback immediately, and we liked that.”

“IT’S CHALLENGING AND BEAUTIFUL. IT’S AS GOOD FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH AS IT IS FOR MY PHYSICAL WELLBEING. I WOULDN’T MISS A DAY”



MAGGIE HALL

Maggie, from Leamington Spa, served in the RAF from 1976 until 1980. She was hit by a car a number of years ago while she was walking in Menorca and had a below-knee amputation in November 2019

What made you decide to join the Tai Chi class?

I’ve dabbled in it before. I tried it after my injury but before my amputation, when I was wearing a leg brace, but I found I couldn’t do a lot of the movements – the classes weren’t tailored to amputees or those with injury. Phil lives with limb loss, so he understands what works for us. I’m so confident in his and Helen’s knowledge and experience – they’re my favourite people on the planet right now!

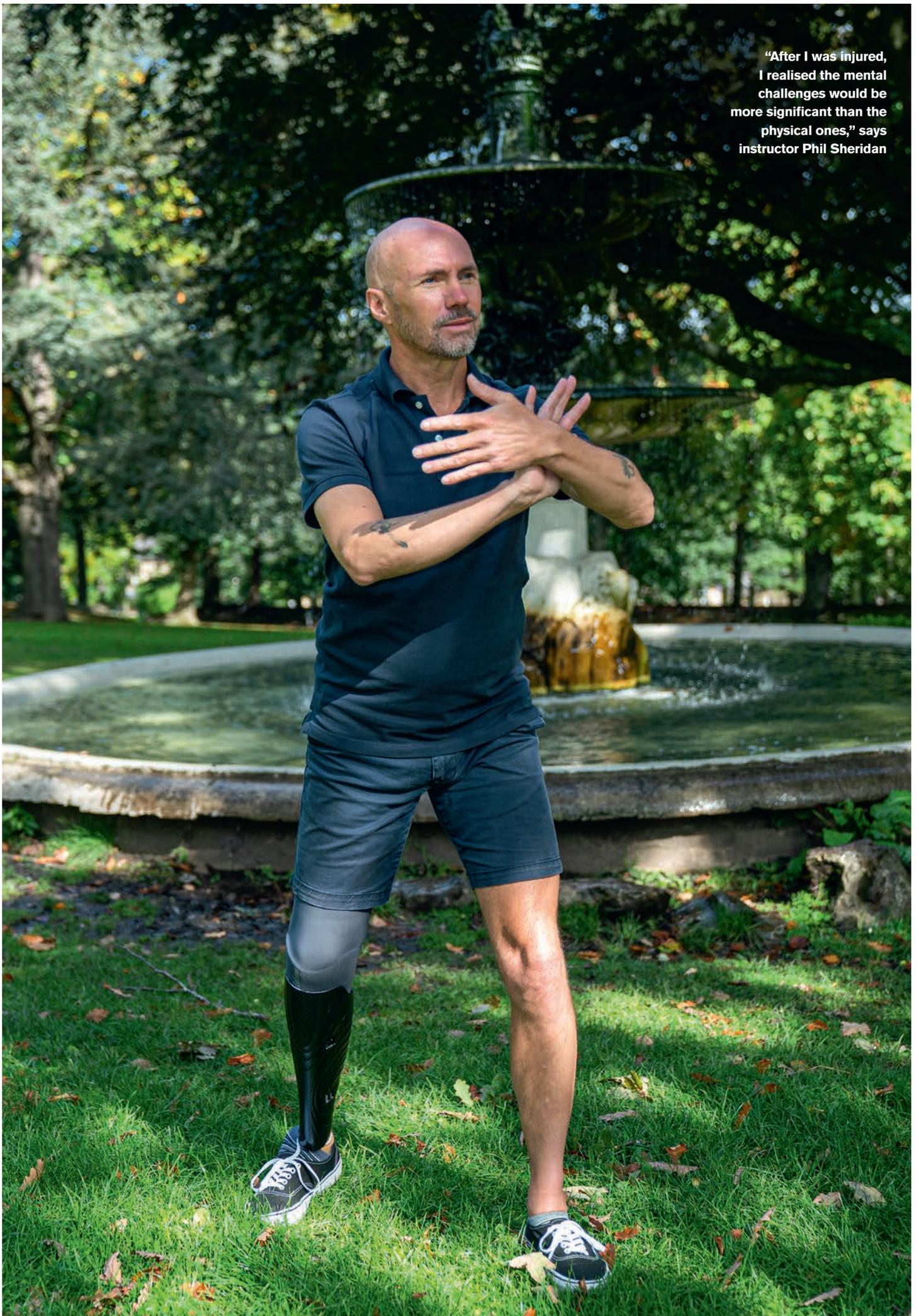
How does it help you physically?

I had a revision to my amputation in September last year, so I’m still pretty new to being an amputee. Physiotherapy can be pretty dry, but Tai Chi makes it enjoyable. You don’t realise just how much you’re actually asking your thighs and hips to do.

And it’s mentally soothing, too?

Absolutely. I have PTSD and live with rage, and Tai Chi takes me back to being the nice person I can be. There’s so much in the beauty of the movement. It’s progressive, it engages the brain and it has a lovely flow. It’s challenging and beautiful, you feel like you’re moving gracefully. It’s as good for my mental health as it is for my physical wellbeing. It’s calming and empowering. I wouldn’t miss a day. I’d love Blesma to put on a residential event.

“After I was injured,
I realised the mental
challenges would be
more significant than the
physical ones,” says
instructor Phil Sheridan





“Some people have preconceived ideas about Tai Chi being mystical, and we’ve got to unpack all that, but the Members got it right away. I think their sense of humour helped. I explained that, as strange as it might sound, I would be talking about our feet a lot, even though we might be missing them, and they were all fine with that,” says Phil. “We made a lot of progress quickly. They were fast learners and maybe that was because they’d done drill in the past. You have to repeat things again and again when you’re starting Tai Chi – *lower your hand here, move it here* – so maybe there’s a crossover with the military. When you’re learning to do something very slowly and precisely, it doesn’t harm that you’ve had a military or a technical job.”

A SENSE OF MASTERY

Phil and Helen are perfect adverts for the benefits of Tai Chi. They both look much younger than their actual ages (“we’re lucky with our genes,” thinks Phil) and exude enthusiasm for the practice. “I’ve been passionate about martial arts since Bruce Lee and the Kung Fu craze in the 1970s,” says Phil, “and Tai Chi is both extremely accessible for any demographic and has a meditation kind of sensibility. It also confers a sense of mastery that you don’t get from something like a Zumba class.

“After I had my accident, I carried on practicing Tai Chi – even when I was in my hospital bed – as part of my recovery. Rehab can be boring, and living with a long-term condition can be a slog, but I found that Tai Chi allowed me to keep making small gains.”

Helen’s background as an occupational therapist is brought into play during the classes, while Phil often discusses his own rehab with students. “I know that after an accident or injury, there’s not just a physical impact. I lost my career and my house. I lost friends, my family was ruptured...” he says. “This is often the case for Blesma Members, so I talk about next steps after injury. In a way, the injuries and surgeries are the easy bits. After all that, you need to figure out how to live again. That’s where organisations like Blesma can be extremely important for people. They recognise that they’re looking after the whole person, not just someone who needs help after a significant event. There’s a life-long commitment there, and they see that activities like ours can help.”

And the feedback from the course has been hugely positive. “Everyone has been incredibly generous,” says Helen. “It’s wonderful to hear people say the course is really good, or that they feel much calmer and more relaxed, or that their balance has already begun to improve. And some have started to share what they’ve learned with their kids, grandchildren, or neighbours. That’s everything we would want to hear in such a short space of time. We’re offering more than just an exercise class!”

Tai Chi is proving to be one of the highest-rated online activities that the Association has ever run. There are plans for more classes in the future – to find out more, contact Clare on 020 3954 3021 or at aecal@blesma.org. For more about Phil and Helen visit www.discovertaichi.uk



STEVE WHITE

Steve served with the Royal Green Jackets from 1982 to 1986. Having suffered knee damage whilst serving, his left leg was amputated above the knee in 2009. Steve is a Blesma Trustee and a keen open water swimmer – he was part of Blesma’s 2014 Channel Swim team

How does the Tai Chi course work?

It’s delivered via Zoom, which I was very sceptical about because I absolutely hate using Zoom for business. But Phil and Helen are incredibly personable and engaging – they’re great at talking to you as both an individual and in a group, so it felt like a face-to-face session. They have adapted their approach in a sophisticated way and the classes have worked really well. They deliver Tai Chi that can work for any impairment.

Had you ever tried anything like this before?

It has crossed my mind, especially since my amputation, but ultimately I haven’t done it because my lower limb impediments were a problem. But Phil and Helen have found a way of making the course work.

What benefits have you felt?

It’s been challenging in a gentle way. Most of all, it has helped me with my flexibility because it causes you to stretch in a way you don’t normally – it’s great for my swimming because I get stiff arms and shoulders. It’s also really relaxing. The breathing Helen and Phil incorporate is great for calming the mind and switching off. I’m going to continue doing it because I think it’s fabulous. I’m a huge advocate.



BRUCE FALKENBERG

Having lived with pain for years, Bruce Falkenberg elected to have his legs amputated. That's when his life started to turn around...

I was born in Zimbabwe. I think boarding school life there prepared me for the military. I was used to clothing and room inspections, the different levels of seniority and gaining different privileges as you stepped up a grade.

In the early 2000s, I came to the UK to visit my parents, who immigrated in the 90s. At the time, a lot of soldiers from the Commonwealth were joining the British Army, and I happened to walk past a Careers Office, so I signed up.

I joined the Royal Regiment of Wales as they were gearing up for a tour of Kosovo. Soon after that tour things started to heat up in Iraq, so I volunteered as an armoured vehicle driver.

I completed one more deployment to Iraq before I started having problems with my feet. The diagnosis was a severe case of plantar fasciitis and tendonitis that were causing my feet to turn up into club feet. Eventually, it reached a stage where I wasn't deployable. I felt as though I was stuck and ended up in a very depressed state.

The remedy was corrective surgery, but after years of pain, relying on medication and not making any progress, I elected to have my legs amputated below the knee in 2013 and 2015. It was the light at the end of the tunnel. That's when my life started to turn around, and I started making gains and achieving some things.

Blesma was instrumental in getting me up and going. The Association helped me get back into cycling by providing me with a recumbent bike. I also found a new lease of life through wheelchair rugby. I joined my local team, and again Blesma stepped in to fund a bespoke rugby wheelchair.

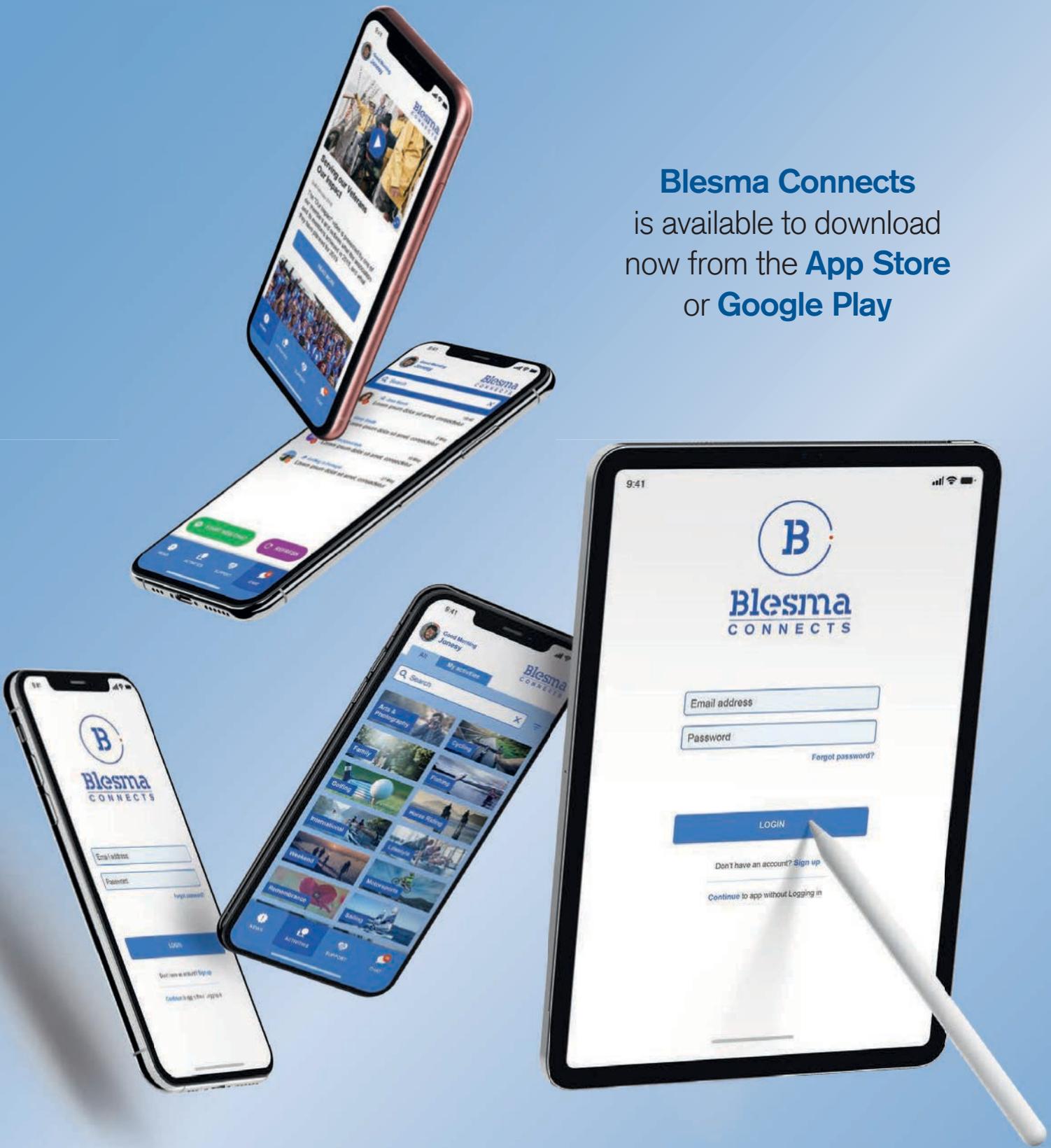
I've also had the Association's support with prosthetic problems, and having my Support Officer Tom's support through dark times has really helped me. More recently, Blesma was integral in helping me regain my independence when I suffered abnormal bone growth in my left stump, which meant I had to use a wheelchair again and needed more surgery.

I live on top of a hill and had a lift fitted to the front of the house, but it constantly broke down. My Support Officer led a collaboration between Blesma, the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, ABF The Soldiers' Charity and the NHS to replace it. Before that, I was stuck in the house or had to struggle to get up and down the drive.

I was encouraged to take part in the Invictus Games trials. That gave me a sense of trying something new and putting myself out there, which led to me trying seated shot put. Now, I'm meeting Paralympic coaches and they're adamant that, with the right training, I could make the grade.

Attempting new things has opened doors for me, but I must be willing to put myself out there and step through them!

**“ATTEMPTING
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