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LEGION

APRIL 2020

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BRINGING US TOGETHER

Our Legion centenary is fast approaching and we're planning a range of themed events and activities to take place during 2021. Turn to page 36 to read more, and over the coming months, we'll provide you with further details on how you can get involved. We look forward to hearing about any bespoke plans you may have for local celebrations. Please do keep us informed about what you're doing and remember to take lots of pictures!

Ever since the Legion was established in 1921, we have looked to the future as well as the past, constantly evolving to be sure we are fit for purpose. Our recently reviewed vision for 2020 and beyond is to bring together nations, communities and individuals to create better futures for our Armed Forces community. Our welfare services are there to improve the lives of those who serve, have served, and their families. Our feature We're Here to Help (page 16) captures how, over the century, we have adapted ourselves to meet increasingly complex needs. We meet three veterans who generously share their personal stories and who explain how the Legion has helped them in so many important ways. Each of these moving testimonies demonstrates courage in the face of adversity and is a profound reminder to all of us how vital a lifeline the Legion can be.

This is just as true of our 83 overseas branches. In September 2019, we launched our first Overseas Team to support membership and beneficiaries abroad. Our feature on page 28 takes you on a whistle-stop tour of the Legion around the globe, with many members extolling the camaraderie of their get-togethers as well as the impact they make when fundraising for or supporting beneficiaries in myriad ways.

Elsewhere in this issue, I was pleased to read about Wing Commander Tara Scott MBE in one of our features celebrating Legion members on page 14. She was appointed President of the Northern Ireland Women's Section in October 2019 and hopes to increase its visibility in the community. Finally, on page 49, I have responded to members' enquiries regarding our recent strategic review, explaining our reasons for the changes.

As I write this, COVID-19 has placed us all in effective lockdown and many of our forthcoming events, especially those planned for VE Day, have now been cancelled. Our priority is to consider the safety of our staff, members and beneficiaries. Please continue to follow government guidelines during this difficult time.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART WOOD, GETTY IMAGES

Una Clemenson

UNA CLEMINSON BEM TD
National Chairman

For queries relating to The Royal British Legion, call 0808 802 8080
(8am-8pm, seven days a week, free from UK landlines and main mobile networks)



Top: Veteran Daniel Bingley tells how we helped him after he was injured on exercise
Above: Looking back over the past 100 years of the Legion

ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY

New 50p Commemorates VE Day



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Specifications: Country of Issue: Isle of Man, Year of Issue: 2020, Coin Diameter: 27.3mm, Coin Weight: 8g, Obverse: Jody Clark, Reverse: Mike Guilfoyle, Metal: Cupro-Nickel, Finish: Brilliant Uncirculated

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THIS YEAR we mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. The day which marked the end of World War II in Europe and brought long awaited peace to our nation.

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What's more, your coin comes presented in a bespoke **Presentation Card** and has been specially struck to a **Brilliant Uncirculated finish**. In recent years, new 50p coins have attracted a whole new generation of collectors. **This VE Day 75th Anniversary 50p coin is sure to be popular with military enthusiasts and coin collectors alike.**

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There will also be 6 more Victory 50p designs released which are available to purchase TODAY. Each coin depicts a design and letter reflecting victory in Europe and this is the **only way to own all 7 coins**. This set is usually priced at £43.75 but today you can own the entire set for just £37.50 (£3.99 p&p) – that's a **£6.25 SAVING**.



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Exploring how our overseas branches are a fantastic support network

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An interview with our National Vice Chairman



CORONAVIRUS

As COVID-19 has now been declared a worldwide pandemic, events are subject to cancellation pending further advice from the government. **Please check with the event organiser and visit www.gov.uk for updates**



ON THE COVER

Meeting our beneficiaries' changing welfare needs

Where to next?

Whether you're longing to get away with a loved one or get together with friends, our 14 hotels and coastal villages excel in all things child-free. Our adults-only breaks include bountiful breakfasts, three-course evening dining, complimentary activities and live music and shows every night.

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NEWS

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST LEGION
STORIES MAKING HEADLINES

VE DAY 75 LONDON EVENTS CANCELLED

The Royal British Legion has taken the difficult decision to cancel its large-scale national events in London to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. This is due to the Government's social distancing guidelines, introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the cancellation will be deeply disappointing, our priority is to protect the health of those who would have been travelling and taking part.

We are working on alternative ways that we can still commemorate the VE Day 75 anniversary on Friday 8 May. These include possible

television and digital programming, with VE veterans participating remotely. More information will be released on this as it is available. If you are organising a local event for VE Day, please refer to Government advice and act accordingly.

At the time of going to press, the VJ Day 75 events in August are still expected to go ahead as planned, but we will continue to monitor the situation and follow public health guidance nearer the time.

For teachers or those home schooling, we have created learning packs to help children aged seven to 14 understand how



we remember the Second World War generation.

Visit www.britishlegion.org.uk and www.gov.uk for the latest information. Find learning packs at www.rbl.org.uk/teachingremembrance

A DAY RETURN TO POPPY APPEAL HQ

In a January episode of BBC Two's *Great British Railway Journeys*, Michael Portillo visited the Poppy Appeal HQ in Aylesford, Kent, where millions of poppies are made. The former Defence Secretary met Robert Lee, Assistant Director of Remembrance, and Ben Martin, Head of Fundraising Operations, and learned about the international origins of this very British symbol of Remembrance. Ben explained how poppies continue to be dispatched even after the Appeal has ended. "We produce around 100,000 poppies a day. It's a year-round operation," he said, before Michael paid his respects at a war memorial based on London's Cenotaph.



Michael Portillo helps out
at Poppy Appeal HQ

A DAY AT THE RACES

This summer, join us for our annual visit to Newmarket on 8 August. There'll be the usual parade of Legion Standards at the July Course before Poppy Race Day begins, plus an Army Air Corps helicopter display. Members and supporters of the Legion get discounted entry – Premier Enclosure is \$21, Grandstand and Paddock is \$14.25. To book up to nine tickets, call 0344 579 3010; or call 01638 675500 (choose option four) for groups of ten or more, quoting RBL2020. **At the time of going to press, this event was going ahead.** Visit www.thejockeyclub.co.uk/newmarket for the latest information.



BUTTERFLY SUITE UNVEILED

The Butterfly Suite, an end-of-life suite that allows residents at Mais House, Bexhill-on-Sea, to end their lives in peace and dignity with their loved ones around them, opened its doors on 10 February, thanks to a £94,558 legacy from Michèle Donald. "Without Michèle Donald, there would be no Butterfly Suite," says Mais House manager Susan Barnes, who was at the opening ceremony led by Jean Rogers, President of The Royal British Legion Sussex, and attended by Barbara Warwick, Epsom and Ewell Branch Chair, Treasurer Bob Ferris and his wife Barbara, local dignitaries and members of other

Legion branches.

Miss Donald, who died in June 2016, had links to the Armed Forces through her work as a physiotherapist, helping injured soldiers regain their mobility



Actor and author Ross Kemp presented the Judges' Special Award to the Legion and D-Day veterans at *The Sun* Military Awards – aka the Millies – last month in recognition of last year's D-Day 75 campaign. During the campaign, we took 255 Normandy veterans across the Channel on a specially chartered ship to attend a series of commemorative events.

Rifleman Jim Kelly (second from left), 92, who landed on D-Day as part of 1st Battalion The Royal Ulster Rifles – 6th

Airborne Division, said: "These nights are so important to remember the comrades who didn't make it. I dedicate this award to their memory."

Jack Mortimer (second from right), 93, who drove a truck to Sword Beach on 6 June 1944, said: "I knew The Royal British Legion would push out the boat for us, but they pushed out a liner. It was an unforgettable experience, so we could once again remember the boys who did not come home."



during stays in hospital. Her father, Adam Donald, served in the Scots Guards (1914-1919) and the Royal Artillery (1925-1945); he received the Burma Star after fighting alongside the Gurkhas in the Second World War when his regiment was stationed in South East Asia.

The legacy also funded a memorial bench in Epsom Market Square, dedicated to Michèle and Adam Donald and all those who have been lost to war.

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HOMES FOR HEROES

As part of the Armed Forces covenant, veterans will be among those granted priority in a Government scheme to cut the cost of some new-build homes by a third for first-time buyers. It will also lower mortgage and deposit requirements.

"Homes for heroes will help place former Armed Forces personnel at the front of the queue to buy a discounted home in their local area," says Johnny Mercer, Minister for Defence People and

Veterans. The discount will be paid for through the contributions that housing developers routinely pay through the planning system to benefit local communities, and will be passed on to the next buyers when the first buyers come to sell.

The Government is still consulting on how the scheme – which councils will also be able to use for frontline workers – will work in practice, but their proposals, published in February this year, include measures to help release more land with permission to build.

NEW ROYAL CHARTER AND MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK



After receiving feedback from members about our Royal Charter (granted in 1925 by King George V, left) and the Membership Handbook, we've worked with members

to review and modernise them both. You'll find the Royal Charter at www.britishlegion.org.uk/quick-links/the-royal-charter while Administrators can find the Membership Management Handbook via <https://trbl.sharepoint.com>

Are you a newly elected Branch Officer in need of training or have you been in your position for a while and need to refresh your knowledge? You could attend one of our training courses delivered by our experienced trainers to enrich your skills and network with other Branch Officers. Contact your County Training Officer or Membership Support Officer to find out more.

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Many members of The Royal British Legion will be aware of the wide range of military clubs in central London for those who are serving, or who have served in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Army and the Royal Air Force. Each is open to membership from a particular Service (or Services), or range of ranks. However, the Victory Services Club is the unique club that is open to membership from all ranks and all Services, without distinction. For those serving in the UK Armed Forces and those of NATO and the Commonwealth, membership of the Victory Services Club is free; a modest annual charge is applied to those who have previously served in the corresponding Armed Forces and also to family members.

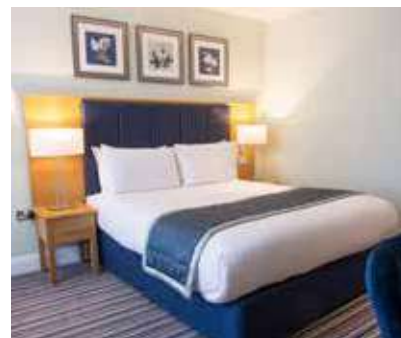
The Victory Services Club has existed since 1907, and is located close to Marble Arch in central London. It can be easily accessed from either Paddington or Victoria railway stations and is well served by London buses and the Central Line Tube, and offers a 50 per cent car-parking discount on Park Lane. Through many years of investment, the Victory Services Club can now offer 202 bedrooms, of which 150 are air conditioned. The Club has nine accessible bedrooms, and access ramps to our main entrances. With a range of prices to suit all pockets, the cheapest bedroom is \$56.50 and the most expensive is currently £127, with a double or twin bedroom available with single occupancy at \$105. Dining facilities have been



extensively refurbished, and an impressive team of chefs delivers wide-ranging menus every day to members, guests, military associations and those who attend ship, regimental or squadron reunion events. The VSC has meeting and event rooms suitable for eight to 300 people, and up to 180 for dinner. The Club is committed to the delivery of Value, Service and Courtesy. Free Wi-Fi is provided throughout the Club. Membership now stands at 65,500, with many of those being family members.

The Club is also a charity that provides free weekends to those recommended by the leading military charities or the Single Service Recovery staffs. In the last financial year, 161 families have enjoyed a stay at the Victory Services Club, which has included free meals, free bedrooms and tickets to a London attraction. The Club also provides free Reward and Recognition breaks to the UK Armed Forces.

Please look at the website (www.vsc.co.uk) to see what the Victory Services Club can provide for you, your family and association.



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"I CARRIED THE LAMPLIGHT OF PEACE TO WESTMINSTER"

After a long and fulfilling career in the Merchant Navy, **Roger Francis CMMar** decided to hang up his life jacket and come ashore. He has been involved with Remembrance activities ever since, including in a special role for the service to mark the centenary of the Armistice in 2018

“

My father was in the Armed Forces but he never spoke

about his Service – it was all very secretive. Eventually, I discovered that he was a Sergeant when he finished. He spent the Second World War in Rhyl and Prestatyn, Wales, as a Skills Training Officer in the Royal Signals.

I joined the Merchant Navy in 1964 and started in Shell tankers, where I remained until 1969. It was here that I did my war Service as well – two or three days loading tankers during the Biafran War [Nigerian Civil War], for which I recently received a Veterans Badge. Prior to this, I had also spent six months running fuel oil into a forward Commando camp in Nhabe, south of Saigon, during the Vietnam War, but this isn't recognised by the British Government because the Royal Navy wasn't there.

After deciding that there must be a better way to progress my career, I joined the Geest Line, and during my six years with them, I obtained my Master's Foreign Going Certificate and ended up as Chief Officer. I then moved to Harrisons (Clyde) as Senior Chief Officer on an ice-class ship that ran between the east coast of Canada and Felixstowe. It was a total change



Roger placing a cross beside his uncle's name at the Tower Hill Memorial

– temperatures fell to -40°C – and I learned a lot about ice navigation. After a season with Hoverlloyd, I joined Stephenson Clarke, where I was in command on several ships. My final career change saw me qualify as a Deep Sea Pilot, which I did until my retirement in 2010.

Since then, my involvement with the Legion has taken off in a big way. I'd been a dormant supporter when working – I couldn't do anything practical when piloting because I was on 24-hour standby. When I retired, the first question I was asked by the Merchant Navy Association was, 'Do you have a Master's uniform that fits?' I did, so I was elected to lay the wreath at the Remembrance Day service at Bristol Cenotaph. Hot on

the heels of that came a request to represent the Merchant Navy at the opening of the Afghan Field of Remembrance at Lydiard Park, Wiltshire. It's now my 10th year at this ceremony – it's my favourite because of its intimate setting.

The culmination of my official duties was the service to mark the centenary of the Armistice in 2018, for which I was responsible for carrying the Lamplight of Peace on its final journey. I boarded a boat at HQS *Wellington* with the lamp, sailed

to Westminster Pier and took it to Westminster Abbey for the service. It was very moving – there were only a few of us there with the Dean, and I was preceded by a lone piper. I then went to Tower Hill for the main Merchant Navy service, and read out some of the names of seafarers who died in the First World War. Later, the lamp was used by HM The Queen to ignite the first of the beacons outside the Abbey. It was quite a day.

The Merchant Navy Association and the Bristol Shiplovers Society, of which I am Chairman, meet at the Whitechurch and Pensford Royal British Legion Club, and I couldn't have hoped for a better welcome. They're a fine advert to join the Legion and long may it continue.” >>



“THE LEGION IS ALWAYS FRONT AND CENTRE”

Wing Commander Tara Scott MBE was appointed President of the Northern Ireland Royal British Legion Women’s Section last October, and hopes to increase its visibility in the community

Officer for Tornados. During those two years, we deployed to Operation Telic, the invasion and subsequent military operations in Iraq. I went to Bahrain and then deployed on a tour to Kuwait.

I served a number of times in the Middle East – including three times in Afghanistan – but my proudest moment was when I was a Squadron Commander at RAF Cranwell, supervising more than 100 Officer Cadets on their journey to becoming Officers. It was brilliant to have been part of their careers.

After 16 years of Service as a regular, I joined the RAF Reserves in a community relations role in April 2015. My job is to be the first point of contact for RAF engagement in Northern Ireland. Although I was aware of the Legion before, I’ve had a lot more to do with it over the past five years – it’s about getting into the community and the Legion represents the biggest part of that. The organisation supports us at events such as Armed Forces Day, and is always front and centre, getting involved.

I was honoured to be appointed President of the Northern Ireland Women’s Section in October 2019. We held our 90th conference last year. I’d really like to help the Legion reach out to people and promote the Women’s Section. I want to get us out there in the same way as the rest of the organisation and make sure we are visible at public events.

I’m proud to work closely with the Legion because of how it recognises Service. Serving your country is quite a unique thing. No matter how long you’ve done it for, it’s a huge part of your identity. It’s about continuing that comradeship and recognising you’ve done something special, which, in my eyes, is exactly what the Legion stands for.”

“ I was born in Omagh, Northern Ireland, and grew up in Belfast; my dad was in the Royal Navy but had left by the time I came along. I was in the RAF Air Cadets at school, so was exposed to the Armed Forces’ way of life and loved it. I went on to study at Lancaster

University, joining the University Officer Training Corps there, then I joined the Intelligence Branch of the RAF, aged 24, in 1999. I initially trained as an imagery analyst and worked at RAF Brampton, covering strategic weapons development. I then moved on to a frontline squadron and was the Intelligence

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WE'RE HERE TO HELP

As the Legion's centenary fast approaches, it's time to reflect on the increasingly complex needs of our Armed Forces community and their families

Ever since The Royal British Legion was established in 1921, we have provided welfare services that help improve the lives of those who serve, veterans and their families. During that time, the needs of the Armed Forces community have changed.

Although the size of the community has decreased, with the ranks of current Service personnel and Second World War veterans in decline, the demand for welfare support has only increased. Beneficiaries' needs are increasingly complex, with issues ranging across employment, finances, housing, mental health, wellbeing and care. Added to that, there are more cases that require multiple forms of support.

Area Manager Ant Metcalfe oversees all of the charity's welfare operations for Wales, including managing the teams who look after the Caseworkers and Advice and Information Officers – “the ones who do the actual groundwork”. He confirms that the needs of beneficiaries are changing drastically. “Nowadays, we are seeing more people coming to us



with what might appear on the surface to be quite a simple issue. But when you meet them face to face or phone them, you realise that they're coming to us because they have no food in the fridge. Then you discover the reason they have no food is because they have six months' worth of priority debt, they're probably about to

be evicted, and they might lose their job as well. Usually, they have mental-health issues. So it becomes a very complex situation,” he explains.

The demographic of beneficiaries is also shifting, he says. “The average age for us has been hovering around early fifties for the past three years. So, at one end of »

John Devlin was only 16 when he signed up. By the age of 18, he was in Iraq, where close friends died and he was himself shot. When he returned, his mental health deteriorated and he chose to leave the Army in his early twenties instead of taking up a posting to Afghanistan. The Legion helped him start to piece together a new life. He is now a pro golfer and married with a young son.

"Where I grew up in Liverpool, gangs were in the ascendancy and you'd get shot at just walking to the shops. So, it was either join the Army or get shot in Liverpool. I signed up at 16, serving in the 2nd Battalion, Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, the youngest intake in the platoon.

The Army turned me into a man and taught me discipline. I loved all the sports and the training, and got awards for my fitness. Then I was posted to Iraq and it was torture, the worst experience of my life. I was only 18, a young boy. A mate from my regiment was killed just before I was due to land, and he'd only been there four days.

I was part of a search team looking for improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as part of a Quick Reaction Force. One day, we were out to recover a broken-down vehicle when a sniper shot me, leaving me with a six-inch scar across my shoulder. An inch to the left or a few inches lower would have been fatal.

I should have died – people even started touching me for good luck. I didn't tell anyone at home I'd been shot >>



because they were worried enough already, and I had another four months to go. It affected me badly and I went off the rails. I now know it was a mental-health condition, but to be honest, no one knew what posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was then. We were far too young to be in Iraq.

When I left the Army, my mum died and everything went downhill for me. I got charged for driving without insurance and I split up with my partner. I did have a house but it had literally nothing in it. I'd asked other organisations for help, but they'd request bank and savings account statements. With my mental-health problems, the thought of sitting down with people and going through my finances made me feel sick. I was embarrassed at the time.

The Legion didn't want to see any of that paperwork. An Outreach worker, Michelle, came to my house and she could see what I needed. She helped me to get my carpet, an oven, a washing machine – everything, basically. She got me on my feet. She even offered to help me paint and clean.

The Legion continued to support me while I got my PTSD diagnosis. I was on a pathway for treatment with [veteran



John winning the Simpson Cup as part of Team GB in 2019

mental-health charity] Combat Stress, but they discharged me. I did have one counselling session with the NHS but the therapist couldn't even look me in the eye, which is a big thing for me. So now I do a lot of meditation and things that put me in a positive frame of mind.

I'm now a professional golfer and everyone thinks I'm doing well, but I still live with PTSD now. It's hard for me because I have a family. At times, I just want to be left alone and it's difficult to tell your wife that. But she understands. I can't go out socialising in certain places and I can't go to Remembrance Day. I got out all my kit ready to go last year, but the anxiety hit me again – it sends me into a dark place and I just can't face it. As much as I want to be a normal person, I can't do it.

But I crack on, and I'm doing what I love. I've had sponsorship from Campbell & McGovern Locksmiths over the past year, which has meant I can keep doing it. I'm grateful to the Legion for being the first to get me on my feet. Without its help when I left the Army, I wouldn't be where I am today. I know if I ever need anything, the Legion will help me, that's the thing. If my wife needs support, it's there for her as well. You know that it's always going to be there."



"I KNOW IF I NEED ANYTHING, THE LEGION WILL HELP ME. YOU KNOW IT'S ALWAYS GOING TO BE THERE"





PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART WOOD, GETTY IMAGES

» the spectrum, we are still supporting elderly veterans who are coming to us because their mobility scooter has broken down and we're paying for repairs. But then we're also engaging with younger veterans, many of whom are in marriages or long-term partnerships and have children. They appear to be leading more chaotic lives – for example, with more debt issues.”

To maximise the support we can offer, the Legion has to evolve. We need to ensure that all of our services meet the needs of today's Armed Forces community, whether it's Welfare, Comradeship, Remembrance or Campaigning. We need to make the biggest contribution we can to improve the lives of those who serve, veterans and their families, to deliver the best possible impact.

However, there are contributing factors that increase the complexity of the issue. “There has been an ongoing government policy of austerity in the past decade,” says Gail Walters, the Legion's Assistant Director of Operations. “It was a policy created to meet the needs of what was going on financially in the country. Local-authority funding

“WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF OUR SERVICES MEET THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY”

has been cut, and the NHS and particularly mental-health services aren't perhaps where anybody would want them to be. There's also an affordable-housing crisis going on.”

The austerity policy has had a knock-on effect on the voluntary sector. Since 2016, the Legion has experienced a 20 per cent increase in cases requiring basic support with housing, financial issues, mental health and wellbeing, and mobility. The number of people with multiple issues has increased, too, with the average expenditure per household through Immediate Needs Grants growing by 45 per cent since 2016. The costs of providing residential and nursing care in the Legion's Care Homes have also increased significantly during the past »



Government austerity policies have led to an increase in the Legion's welfare-support caseload



Legion Care Home
Galanos House, in
Warwickshire

» 10 years because of long-term reductions in local-authority funding for adult social care.

However, there is also an opportunity here for the Legion. “We are, in many ways, fortunate as a voluntary-sector organisation in that we have the resources to respond to these needs and we work alongside those statutory authorities to help people,” Gail explains. “We’re not a replacement for statutory services and we will always hold them to account for what they have to deliver. However, we can wrap around an individual, guide them through those services, make authorities aware of individuals who might be at risk and also provide additional services that can help.”

A MODERN WELFARE ORGANISATION

To understand those opportunities – and where the Legion can make a huge difference to the lives of those

we support – it’s worth considering the very sharp end of our welfare services. Marc Carter, Regional Lead Outreach in the Midlands, works with the Legion’s most at-need beneficiaries. Outreach is, in effect, an internal referral system: welfare cases are passed from the call centre onto the Midlands Area office, which will pass on the most vulnerable and at-risk cases to Marc and his team of seven (nationally, there are 16 full-time Outreach posts). »

“WE CAN MAKE
AUTHORITIES
AWARE OF PEOPLE
WHO MIGHT BE AT
RISK AND ALSO
PROVIDE SERVICES
THAT CAN HELP”

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART WOOD

Naomi Hall, 37, had a 16-year career in the military as a Senior Aircraftwoman, including tours in the Falklands and Afghanistan. She left the RAF after suffering mental-health problems following the horrific death of a close colleague and an illness of her own. She turned to the Legion for help adjusting to civilian life – but a few years later was in a near-fatal car crash. Again, the Legion was there to help her pick up the pieces.

"I did a four-month stint in Afghanistan in 2011 and, to be honest, I loved it out there. But immediately after I returned home, a colleague was shot in the face and killed while doing his job, and that affected me deeply. He had a nine-week-old baby daughter and as a young mother myself, it shook me.

I was left feeling guilty about coming home in one piece.

Soon after,

I lost another close friend.

Then I had

a severe bout of glandular fever. My

depression got worse. My

view is that the only thing that

really gets you out of a slump

is exercise, but when I was ill,

I couldn't do any, which is why

things got as bad as they were.

One day, I just walked into a

store, picked up a knife and started

cutting myself. The RAF put me on

sick leave for

27 months and

I never went back to Service.

It was around this time that I did

my first multi-activity course at the Battle Back Centre. I loved it. I went in on the Monday and was like a deer in headlights. By Friday lunchtime, I didn't want to leave. It's not just the sports involvement but the life coaching that comes with it. I freely admit there were tears. It's very optimistic and I left feeling completely different, thoroughly energised.

When I left the RAF, I moved 200 miles away. I knew I needed to get away from the Chinooks, the Lynx and the firing range. I found a job and things were going OK. One day, I saw a Legion Facebook advert asking for female veterans who had been on the multi-activity course to go whitewater rafting in the USA. I applied and forgot about it; I assumed there would be thousands of women who'd want to do it. But then the Battle Back Centre got in touch and said, 'We want you to come.' It was an incredible trip.

Then my whole life changed again.

In January 2017, my Fiat collided with another car on the M58 near Skelmersdale, before hitting two trees. The North West Air Ambulance carried me to the Major Trauma Centre in Aintree University Hospital, Liverpool. I was in a coma for two weeks.

During that time, I had no control over who knew what. I didn't even know what had happened to me. But I think a friend got in touch with the Legion because suddenly I got quite a few cards, including some from people who had been on the rafting trip. I received loads of support from a distance.

My life was now a complete reversal. I'd gone from being physically fine but mentally not-so-great, to mentally feeling that everything had been knocked clean, but with all these severe physical needs. The Battle Back Centre invited me on another rafting trip that September. I was walking with a cane and the difference compared with my first trip was palpable: I'd lost so much strength in my upper body, I still had huge amounts of rib pain and I couldn't really sit properly. It wasn't the same trip, but the fact I could still go and do it was a big thing for me. >>



Left: Naomi
after her car
accident
Below: with
her daughter

I also had a Legion Caseworker around this time. She was investigating how the organisation could help because I suddenly had enormous bills. I couldn't get the physiotherapy I needed on the NHS – I was meant to be having three hours a week when I was discharged – so I started paying for personal-training sessions; I felt I couldn't afford not to. The Legion came and did an assessment to investigate whether it could help – and ended up contributing to my costs for a while.

Later, the Battle Back Centre got in touch again to say that they were doing their inaugural veterans' multi-activity course and invited me. I couldn't attend, but my friend, whom I'd met on the rafting trips, did. It was a massive thing for her – the fact that she was able to go and do that was more of a boost to me than going myself because I knew what she would get out of it.

In January 2018, I lost my job before I'd even managed to return after my accident. I found myself unemployed for the first time in my entire adult life. I reached out to my

contact at Battle Back, asking if I could do some volunteering. Instead, she asked me to go on the second veterans' multi-activity course. That was fantastic and I felt like I'd got a jump start. For me, it was an opportunity to boost my mood and realise I do have a value even without a job. I'd fallen into a way of thinking: 'Things aren't going very well; this is how things always go for me.' But the course helped me to see for myself that this wasn't the end of the world. There are people going through life every day with worse injuries than me and they find a way.

I got another job a few months later as a project manager in the automotive industry. It's not without its challenges. I have a brain injury from the car accident so my short-term memory is pretty poor. I live an awful lot by routine to put less pressure on my brain, which means I've got spare capacity for when I come to work. I guess I'm fortunate in a way – I know I've got this limitation, so I do a bit more to make it easier on myself.

I buy my poppy every year. The Legion is part of life when you're in the military. When you think of a veteran, you don't think of someone as young as me, but I'm a veteran now and the Legion has supported me through my health issues. When I was asked to be North West Media Ambassador for the 2018 Poppy Appeal, I didn't even need to think about it. I said, 'I don't know what it entails, but of course I'll do it.' The Legion helped me to see that just because something's new for me, it doesn't mean it's impossible."



**"I LEFT THE BATTLE BACK CENTRE
FEELING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT,
THOROUGHLY ENERGISED"**

“THE LEGION SUPPORTS THOSE TRYING TO NAVIGATE A CONFUSING WELFARE SYSTEM”

» “My team will work with homelessness or risk of homelessness. We work with mental health; substance abuse; alcohol misuse; and criminal-justice services, such as offending behaviour and people at risk of criminal behaviour,” he says. “We deal with psychological and mental-health problems, domestic violence – the whole range of complex needs.” He says most of his cases are in difficulty with housing; for example, they are unable to maintain a tenancy, are homeless already or are about to be evicted.

Part of Marc’s job is to connect with other services, to build a network that will support a vulnerable individual in addressing their problems. “What other services are available is a bit of a postcode lottery,” he says. “I’ll attend meetings for drug and alcohol services, and for mental-health teams. I’m also happy to give talks to local authorities and the housing teams, just to let them know what Outreach can do. Many people don’t know the Legion provides this service.”

It’s hard to overestimate the value of Marc’s work. While most Service leavers integrate perfectly well into civilian life, those who do struggle can be trying to navigate a world that is totally unfamiliar to them.

“A lot of those I work with are 25 to 32 years old and left school with no qualifications,” says Marc. “Their



Outreach teams offer support with the mental-health problems that can follow Service, such as post-traumatic stress disorder

choices seem to have been either to become involved in local crime and gangs or to join the Armed Forces. So, they often lack emotional development. They leave Service with a whole heap of experiences, some good, some bad. And they’re not well equipped to deal with that in society because they frequently don’t have a support network – neither peer support nor family support, nor any sort of social and community support. Employment is difficult for them and they don’t know how to navigate the system.”

Marc has made it his mission to try to make the system more accessible for people who have only known Service. “There are a couple of alcohol services in my area for veterans, but there are no drug services,” he says. “Vets are coming from a very structured environment.

Many local drug services run prescribing clinics with people who are still in active addiction and still involved in that lifestyle.” Marc says that many veterans are put off by that because it’s alien to them. “They don’t want to engage in that environment, so they need hand-holding.” Marc will help those who need to access these services, effectively acting as their advocate.

PREPARED FOR THE FUTURE

The Legion needs to stay by the side of those veterans trying to navigate a confusing welfare system and we have recently reviewed all of our services with this in mind. The new Legion vision is to bring together our nations, communities and individuals to create better futures for our Armed Forces community and their families. Clearly, welfare is chief among the priorities. »

» “At the heart of our welfare is a casework approach,” says Gail. “Over recent years, we’ve learned to become more holistic. So, when an individual presents themselves or is referred to us, we do a 360° investigation of their needs because we want to send them on their way with the ability to live a fulfilled life with all of those needs met. If we are only addressing the surface need, we may miss other factors that will affect them later on.”

While this is the best way forward, it requires a Legion team that is correctly trained and resourced. Jane Britton, Area Manager for the West Midlands, echoes her colleague Ant’s experiences of the increasing complexity of cases coming through. “We get about 10 to 15 every day. It’s only when you start unpicking what’s behind each

one that you realise it’s more complicated than what was initially presented,” she says.

Jane is currently completing a review of the ‘intensity of resource’ that each case takes so that she can ensure her team have all the tools they need to provide the best service to each beneficiary. “Some of these cases take two or three years. They involve multiple internal and external teams,” she says. “The clients will engage for a bit and then disengage. My team might be having to respond to someone who is presenting with suicidal ideation – they’re not mental-health professionals, so they need to be trained to know how to assess this kind of presentation.” Legion staff and volunteers need the appropriate support to make sure they’re able to cope with the emotional load that some cases inevitably cause.

In order to be prepared to look after the welfare of the Armed Forces community for the next 100 years, the Legion requires this more holistic approach. This means understanding the needs of all of our beneficiaries, from the oldest to the youngest, and being unafraid to evolve to meet those needs.

“Looking forward, we’ll continue to review our welfare delivery to ensure that it is best able to deal with the complex issues of those we are helping,” Gail concludes. “That includes those who may have a quite simple issue to be addressed right through to those with more complicated needs. We will continue to deliver a range of support to the full wealth of our Armed Forces community – not just veterans, but also their dependants and those still serving.”

The Battle Back Centre offers sports and adventurous activities to aid the recovery of wounded, injured and sick Service personnel



“WE’VE LEARNED
TO BECOME MORE
HOLISTIC AND DO A
360° INVESTIGATION
OF NEEDS”

Daniel Bingley served in the Yorkshire Regiment from the age of 16 and became a Corporal. He served in Germany, Poland, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Canada and America, and conducted tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, which included a posting for six months in Baghdad. He was medically discharged in September 2017 at the age of 32 after suffering injuries to his knees while on exercise.

"During my tour of Iraq in 2007, I was in an ISO container when a mortar landed outside. It only damaged my ears at the time, and I just dealt with it; life was going on, so I put it to the back of my mind.

Then, on a course in 2017, I was carrying a stretcher on exercise and fell on both my knees, causing significant damage. I had to leave the Army because I couldn't get up in the morning and do the things they wanted me to do because I was in too much pain.

It also meant I had to stop doing sport – and that's when the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) came to the fore. I've been diagnosed with Asperger's traits and because of that, I have a very good memory. My recollections of my time in Iraq were always there, but the way I kept them at bay was to go for a run. I couldn't do that after my injury, so I just started melting down. I tried

killing myself because I couldn't deal with it any more.

I was in a really dark place and I didn't know what to do. Sport saved my life, basically: I rediscovered it through initiatives for veterans. I began to get involved in the Warrior Games and I participated in the Invictus Games in Sydney in 2018 – the Legion paid for my family to travel with me for support. I won four medals in four sports, including wheelchair rugby and basketball.

I try to put it this way: without having the negative, I wouldn't know what the positive was. Obviously, everyone has negatives in their life, but my negatives are bigger than a lot of people's. So, when I have a good day, I appreciate all the good things about it.

I have a wheelchair and a specially adapted car so I can get about. I'm in the GB development team for sitting volleyball and I coach my own >>

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART WOOD



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sitting volleyball team. I also play wheelchair rugby and wheelchair basketball whenever I can. (I play any sport, really – whatever keeps me active.) In addition, I'm involved with the Legion Games, a computer-game fundraising project for the charity, and I'm studying for a computer science degree on a scholarship from the Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund, for which I'm also an ambassador. I like being busy. Not being busy is not good for my head because I have time to think about weird stuff.

Since my discharge, I have appealed my war pension and it's been a long process. My Legion caseworker, John, has been amazing. He took all my medical files to go through them in his spare time. He'd come over to my house and clarify things, and he would highlight key areas and articulate them better. He works for the Legion on a voluntary basis, holds down a job and still has time to check in on me. He also helped to get my house adapted to make it easier for me to get around.

The Legion has funded a clinical assessment with a specialist in Yorkshire, with the subsequent report being used to support the war-pension case. Having that point of contact with John has really got me

Playing wheelchair basketball for the UK in the 2018 Invictus Games, for which he won a bronze medal
Below: with teammate Mark Perkins



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

through the past year. He has arranged everything, from my travel to York to see the specialist, to providing guidance and a regular phone call to check I'm OK.

Unfortunately, my war-pension appeal was unsuccessful, but now we're applying to the Upper Tribunal and the only person who's still helping me is John. He's there for emotional support – I see or talk to him about once a week.

I've had a lot of treatment for PTSD – CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy] and EMDR [Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy] – but it hasn't been very successful. The problem they keep coming back to is my Asperger's traits. To be fair, everyone keeps trying and I won't quit either. But part of that is to accept that this is your life and you have to keep going – you can't let it get you down."



AROUND THE WORLD

IN 83 BRANCHES

In September 2019, we launched our first Overseas Team to support every one of our 83 far-flung overseas branches, and we've been learning what they get up to, from Bordeaux to Brazil >>

The following is a list of the Legion's overseas branches:

BELGIUM

Antwerp
Brussels
Ypres

BELIZE

BRAZIL

Rio de Janeiro
São Paulo

BRITISH OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

Falklands
Gibraltar

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Alderney

Guernsey Northern
Guernsey Western
Jersey
Sark

CHILE

Santiago

CHINA

Hong Kong
& China

CYPRUS

Kyrenia
Larnaca
Limassol
Paphos

FIJI

FRANCE

Bordeaux &
South-West France
Central Brittany

Linazay,
Poitou-Charentes
Lyon Liberation
Nice-Monaco
Nord/Pas de
Calais
Paris
Somme

GERMANY

Bergen-Hohne
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Zurgena

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Torremolinos

SWITZERLAND

THAILAND

Chonburi

USA

East Coast USA
San Francisco
Tulsa

Birthday cakes, barbecues, Poppy Appeals and fundraisers – life in The Royal British Legion branches overseas is pretty similar to that back home, with the main difference being that shindigs and get-togethers often take place in remote areas or under tropical skies.

There are branches in Kenya, Belize, Tokyo and São Paulo to name just a few, bringing together supporters, expats and fundraisers dedicated to helping out where they can and enjoying the camaraderie in the process.

“There are 83 branches overseas and I have found that because they are overseas they are far more focused on comradeship and holding social events than those back in the UK,” says Kate Green, Area Manager Overseas. “This is probably because they are a much smaller community,” she adds.

These branches were left very much to their own devices until last year, when the Overseas Team of seven launched in September 2019, to make networking and knowledge-sharing easier and to support the first responders for veterans overseas who are in need.

“In the past, Overseas was almost like a secondary job for several people across the Legion, who did whatever they were doing day to day, and then dabbled in Overseas,” continues Kate. “This is the first time we’ve had an Area Manager and Case Officers – it is a team completely dedicated to Overseas.”

Branches share their news with each other via a quarterly newsletter, which Area Administrators help to compile. It goes out to all branches to help everyone keep in touch – obviously vital for a membership that’s scattered across the world, with 120,000 volunteers providing support to veterans in 22 countries.

Spain is a particularly active region, with 30 branches across the country (18 in northern Spain and 12 in the south). Activities range from the very local – trips and

socials – to events of major commemorative importance. Among the latter was the service of thanksgiving in Spanish and English at Orihuela Cathedral in the province of Alicante in Spain in June last year to honour British and Spanish Armed Forces. Kevin Reardon, Chairman of the Orihuela Costa and District Branch, was there at the door of the 13th-century cathedral to greet the 400-strong congregation, which included our National Chairman Una Cleminson, together with Servicemen, veterans including local D-Day veteran Joe ‘the Cat Man’ Billet and Chelsea Pensioners, with marches played by the band of The Royal British Legion, Spain.

Germany is very active, too, with 15 branches, which are currently adapting to the withdrawal of the final British Army units and the relocation of troops from Germany to the UK.

“Despite the loss of British troops (and most of our members), our branch in north Germany continues to thrive,” says Keith Orton, Bergen-Hohne Branch Chairman. “Thanks to the generosity of the local German Panzerbataillon, who moved into the vacated British barracks, we have use of a facility for meetings and social events through the year.”

German troops haven’t just provided a venue – they’ve also thrown themselves into the Legion world and joined as members, wholeheartedly supporting an action-packed calendar of Remembrance duties, welfare work and socials, including a 5km Poppy Appeal Fun Run in August. “There’s a huge turnout from the Panzerbataillon and the local Fire Brigade Training Establishment, who run in full gear,” Keith says.

All overseas branches get involved in fundraising – and it’s impressive what they can achieve in testing circumstances. The Hong Kong and China Branch, for example, raised a whopping HK\$714,539 (more than £70,000) in last November’s Poppy Appeal, against a



From left: Spain's Mojácar Branch thanks a local bar owner for his Poppy Appeal efforts; celebrating the 14th birthday of the Coin Branch, also in Spain; darts night for members of the Bergen-Hohne Branch in Germany



backdrop of petrol bombs, civil unrest and street protests at the now-withdrawn extradition bill, and all in a tough economic climate, with the city entering recession in large part due to the disruption.

In other cases, members of overseas branches contribute painstaking on-the-ground research that's invaluable to the Armed Forces and their families. Michael Hardcastle, a member of the Rheindahlen Branch, whose father was stationed with the British Army on the Rhine in the 1950s, photographed and transcribed almost 1,500 graves in the Military Cemetery in Rheindahlen, Mönchengladbach, last year, uploading the information and making it available to all (at www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2683184/memorial-search). Some of the graves were of babies and children of Armed Forces families who are no longer living in Germany. "The feedback I received was overwhelming," he says of the reaction he got after he put the information online.

The connection between overseas branches and their host countries is often strong and heartfelt. "Every year, we attend the Thai Veterans parade at the Army base in Chonburi, between Pattaya and Bangkok, where they have a wreath-laying and memorial service at their Korean war memorial," says Roy Wilson, Branch Secretary of the Chonburi Thailand Branch. The mutual respect between both sets of veterans is palpable. The Brits are supported in practical ways, too, by the Chonburi community, with several bars providing a venue for their quarterly meetings, AGM and fundraising socials – at one they raised £750 from auctioning memorabilia, photographs and paintings.

Likewise, the East Coast USA Branch stands shoulder-to-shoulder with North American comrades. "I organised the parades and wreath layings on behalf of the City Council in Lakeland, Georgia, on both Memorial >>

"BRANCHES OVERSEAS ARE MORE FOCUSED ON COMRADESHIP AND HOLDING SOCIAL EVENTS THAN THOSE IN THE UK, PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY'RE A SMALLER COMMUNITY"

From top: A fun run organised by the Bergen-Hohne Branch; Legion members attend the Thai Veterans parade, wreath laying and memorial service in Chonburi, Thailand; the Hong Kong Branch celebrates the Poppy Appeal

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Day in May and Veterans Day in November, when we were proudly covered in the local newspapers and on TV,” says Terry Burton, Branch Secretary. “My young daughter Alex always enjoys being our proud Poppy Collector at the events,” he adds.

The São Paulo Branch puts on a *churrasco* or barbecue each year for more than 200 people to raise awareness and increase community involvement.

In Bordeaux, a square next to the river has even been named after a daring Second World War raid, known as Operation Frankton. Place Frankton commemorates the night of 11-12 December 1942 when ten Commandos in flimsy two-man canoes placed limpet mines on six enemy vessels in Bordeaux, causing significant damage, with only two men living to make their escape.

Members of the Bordeaux and South-West France Branch of the Legion gather there with both French and British people of the area every 12 December to lay wreaths and remember the heroism of the men. Lord Mountbatten pronounced that: “Of the many brave and dashing raids carried out by the men of Combined Operations Command, none was more courageous or imaginative than Operation Frankton.”



The East Coast USA Branch commemorates Memorial Day (below) and Alex, the Branch Secretary's daughter, takes part in the Poppy Appeal (below right)



From top: Duncan Andrews, Bordeaux and South-West France Branch Chairman, at Le Verdon-sur-Mer; a commemorative medal to mark the 75th anniversary of Operation Frankton; Duncan with British Consul Dominique Olly



As well as commemorative events, the branch has an active social calendar. “We cover an area approximately the size of Wales and so we don’t have a clubhouse. This means that get-togethers tend to be localised things,” says Branch Chairman Duncan Andrews. Appropriately for a branch based in a world-famous wine region, it has its own Legion-labelled Bordeaux, which helps golf days and book sales go with a swing. The branch raised €17,000 (£14,800) last year through its various Poppy Appeal schemes, but being part of an active network through which members can help each other out is also vitally important.

“Personally, I think the ability to be available, if needed, to other British people who need help, especially with Brexit, is a huge benefit of being part of an overseas branch,” says Duncan.

Housing, financial issues, mobility, and mental health and wellbeing are the things that veterans tend to need help with, and there are many instances of voluntary agencies and the Legion working together to show that there are always people out there who care about veterans and their families’ wellbeing.

Although many people reach out to the Overseas Team directly, overseas branches are a vital component of the huge Legion network, and often have the direct ➤

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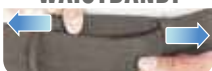
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“WE GET LETTERS THAT HAVE BEEN TWICE AROUND THE WORLD – THEY’VE GOT HOOF PRINTS ON THEM AND LOOK AS IF THEY’VE COME FROM HALFWAY UP A MOUNTAIN!”

contacts that enable them to know who would benefit from support before more serious issues develop.

In Spain, a Veterans Club is being trialled on the Orihuela Costa, aimed especially at those who live on their own and at highlighting the work of the Legion in Spain, funded by money raised in the country through the Poppy Appeal. The three gatherings so far have involved gentle fitness sessions, games, crafts demonstrations and refreshments. They have brought together almost 100 vets, dozens of them with no prior connection to the Legion, many of whom might otherwise have spent the day sitting in isolation at home.

And to back up this kind of work, the Overseas Team is there to help when veterans in the remotest regions reach out to the Legion for assistance.

“We deal directly with beneficiaries around the world, so we do exactly as our teams do in the UK. The only difference is that we will probably never meet those who we are working with,” says Kate. “We deal with lots of welfare cases, we get letters that have sometimes been twice round the world because they’ve got hoof prints and all sorts on them and look as though they’ve come from halfway up a mountain!”

“We have to be inventive,” she continues. “We’ll work with a consular office or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or a defence attaché somewhere – even vicars in remote parts of the world who will help us help those in need. It’s amazing. I’m so glad I made the jump – I mean, I had East Anglia before,” she laughs. “I’ve gone from the Fenlands to the Himalayas! Life has completely changed.”

If you’re overseas and need support or know someone overseas who is eligible for Legion assistance, then you can call or email us. **The Contact Centre number for outside the UK is: +44 20 3376 8080 or email us at overseasops@britishlegion.org.uk**

From top: Enjoying a good read at the District North Spain Annual Conference; refreshments at the Orihuela Costa’s Veterans Club; District North Spain Chairman Don Cubbon and Alicante Branch Chairman Jack Kemp; a fitness session at the Veterans Club

2021: 100 YEARS OF THE LEGION

To celebrate our 100th anniversary, we look back to the origins of The Royal British Legion and ask for your help with creating and curating our first-ever historical archive, which will be free to use and open to all

Since it was founded in 1921, The Royal British Legion has always looked to the future as well as the past. Our reason for being then, as it is now, was to care for those who had suffered as a result of Service – and to give them the ability to make a bright future for themselves and their families. But we also exist to acknowledge the sacrifice of all who serve, and to give veterans the opportunity to maintain the camaraderie built during their Service.

In 2021, the Legion will mark its centenary, not only supporting traditional activities and keeping the memory of the past alive in the nation's heart, but also working at the cutting edge of welfare and rehabilitation services.

MEMBERSHIP: THE LEGION'S HEART AND SOUL

The key to the Legion's longevity and continued relevance is in its roots. The British Legion was formed on 15 May 1921, bringing together four benevolent organisations: The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, The British National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers, The Comrades of The Great War and The Officers' Association. Our first President



Field Marshal Douglas Haig, 1st Earl Haig, KT, GCB, OM, GCVO, KCIE, was the Founder President of what was then called The British Legion

was Field Marshal Earl Haig, one of the driving forces behind the amalgamation.

The fact that so many disparate but similar organisations had come into being shows the extent of the crisis that society was plunged into in the aftermath of the First World War. Britain's economy plummeted and in 1921, there were two million people unemployed.

More than six million men had served in the war. Of those who came back, 1.75 million had suffered some kind of disability and half of these were permanently disabled. The Legion was the first to attempt

a coordinated response to try to alleviate some of that suffering. Then, within a generation, a new wave of Service men and women who had seen action in the Second World War came to rely on us. Ever since then, there hasn't been a time that the Legion hasn't been needed to perform the same role it was set up to do in 1921.

Of course, the Legion wouldn't be what it is without its worldwide membership structure. Today, there are 230,000+ members and 2,500 branches, of which 83 are overseas. Our members are the beating heart of the Legion, providing comradeship and a focal point for local Remembrance activities – and reaching out to those in the Armed Forces community who may have become isolated. When the Legion was founded, membership was limited to veterans. In 1981, it was opened up to currently serving personnel. Now, anyone is welcome to become a member, reflecting our evolution into a modern membership organisation with the welfare of the Armed Forces community as our primary concern.

SYMBOLISM: THE POPPY

The 100th anniversary of the Legion is also the 100th anniversary of the UK Poppy Appeal. The Legion was

not, in fact, the first organisation to adopt the poppy as a symbol of Remembrance, although it has perhaps become the most famous. It was an American, Moina Michael, who started to wear a poppy to remember the war dead and to distribute them at the YMCA Overseas War Secretaries headquarters in New York, where she worked, during its annual conference. She campaigned to get it recognised as an official symbol of Remembrance, and two years later, the National American Legion agreed.

Also involved with these efforts was a Frenchwoman, Anna Guérin, who had the idea to make and sell poppies to raise money for children affected by the First World War. Earl Haig, our founder, heard about her work, saw the fundraising potential and immediately ordered nine million poppies to sell on 11 November 1921, for the first Poppy Appeal. It raised £106,000. (Today, 40,000 volunteers distribute 40 million poppies. The 2018 Poppy Appeal raised £55 million.)

The poppies for the 1921 Poppy Appeal came from Madame Guérin, but in 1922, the Poppy Factory opened and since then, all of the UK's poppies have been manufactured there. Today, the

Poppy Factory not only provides jobs for wounded, sick and injured veterans making poppies and wreaths at the site in Richmond, Surrey, but it is also helping them to find employment in their own communities.

Moina Michael was apparently inspired to wear a poppy by John McCrae's poem *In Flanders Fields*. But McCrae wasn't the first to be moved by the sight of the red flowers on the battlefield. Corn poppies thrive in disrupted soil and there is documentation from as far back as the Napoleonic wars remarking on the fact that the flowers grew in the earth where soldiers had fallen.

HOW THE LEGION WILL MARK ITS CENTENARY

To mark this significant moment in the Legion's history, we are planning a range of centenary-themed events and activities to take place during 2021. One of the great things we will be doing is creating and curating our first-ever Legion historical archive. This will be a free-to-use, innovative, fully searchable, user-friendly database, which will also serve as a digital repository library and will be made accessible to both members and the general public.



To help make the archive a real success, we will require your help. If you have any photographs, historical records or items that you think could be useful, do let us know – they could be featured as part of our collection.

"This is a very exciting time for our charity," says Director General Charles Byrne. "The centenary (Legion 100) will help to support the One Legion strategy by bringing nations, individuals and communities together to celebrate the tremendous achievements of the Legion over the last 100 years and also provide us with a platform to present why we will still be relevant in the future.

"None of the work that we have achieved could have been done without the dedication and hard work of our members, volunteers and staff.

"I look forward to all the great celebrations that will happen during 2021."

LET'S CELEBRATE TOGETHER

How are you planning to mark the centenary? Are you teaming up with other branches? We would love to hear about it. Email membersmag@britishlegion.org.uk to tell us more.



MEET JOE FALZON

An interview with our National Vice Chairman,
Lieutenant Colonel Joe Falzon OSJ BEM



Have you served in the Armed Forces yourself?

Yes, I enjoyed a full military career with the Royal Regiment of Artillery for just over 37 years, progressing through the ranks from Gunner to Lieutenant Colonel. At regimental duty, I was Chief Clerk of 20th Medium Regiment (Devizes, Northern Ireland and Hong Kong) and 94th Locating Regiment (Celle), and Quartermaster of the Junior Leaders' Regiment (Nuneaton) and 5th Heavy Regiment (Dortmund). In 1975, I was awarded the BEM for services in Northern Ireland.

Tell us about your background in the Legion.

On retirement from the Army in 2001, I was offered the position of Head of Policy Planning & Administration. I hesitated for a few days before accepting; it was only after my son and daughter-in-law announced that they were going to call their first child Poppy that I was persuaded to sign the employment contract!

My next ten years serving the Legion were fast-moving, exciting,

fulfilling and full of change and growth. Over that period, governance changed from a fully elected National Council to a Board of Trustees with both elected and appointed Trustees, plus the Membership Council was formed, the head office in London moved from Pall Mall to Borough High Street, and the Poppy Appeal income increased from £21.5 million in 2001 to £40 million in 2011. After retiring from the Legion in 2011, I was first nominated by my branch (Stapleford & Berwick St James) and elected as a Trustee in May 2014. During my tenure as a Trustee, I was entrusted to chair the Property Committee and the International Committee.

With the centenary fast approaching, what is the Legion doing to ensure it remains fit for purpose for the next 100 years?

Legion 100 gives us all the platform to acknowledge our centenary and celebrate some of The Royal British Legion's magnificent achievements over the years. It also provides us with an opportunity to first examine and review why the Legion is still as relevant today as it was 100 years ago, and then to showcase a reinvigorated Legion nationwide and overseas. Our emerging strategic

vision to bring together our nations, communities and individuals to create better futures for our Armed Forces community and their families will be the banner for us to pursue and measure against at every opportunity.

What should we be doing to prepare for the centenary?

Legion counties, groups, branches and clubs are encouraged to start looking, along with their local communities and other agencies, at how they would like to celebrate the centenary. They need to start preparing the ground now to develop their own activities and events to highlight the positive impact of the Legion at local level.

What does this year's Remembrance theme, 'Coming Home', mean to you?

I'm very much in favour of having a single theme for everyone to rally behind. I have personally experienced the emotions, anxieties and exhilarations of 'coming home' from operations or long periods of separation. In my day, it wasn't as easy to stay in close contact with your friends and family at home as it is today, and I was fortunate to return to my loved ones unscathed by conflict on every occasion.

"I KNOW OF SCORES OF VETERANS WHO HAVE BEEN HELPED WITH GRANTS, VISITS TO WAR GRAVES AND PAYMENT OF RENT ARREARS"

Why are you passionate about the Legion?

I remember one of my Commanding Officers addressing the regiment before we were deployed and reminding us that, "People with passion will do things that those who lack passion will avoid." I adopted that principle from an early age in my approach to situations and people, especially when things needed to get sorted and deadlines had to be met. My passion for the Legion as an organisation and for the people in it stems from my reputation as someone who gets things done through hard work and a sense of duty.

Why is the Legion as important today as it has been for the past 99 years?

Because we are indispensable in what we do and what we stand for in terms of service delivery, comradeship and Remembrance, and because we can boast huge commitment from our volunteers and members. We benefit from their combined voice and clout, which is invariably listened to when we campaign on behalf of the Armed Forces community.

Do you know anyone who has been helped by the Legion?

I know of scores of veterans who have been helped by the Legion with small individual grants, visits to war graves overseas, bereavement and funeral



The Legion's volunteers and members help with everything from fundraising to marshalling at events

support, payment of rent arrears, provision of brown and white goods, help with mobility equipment and so on. All case studies worthy of a mention in their own right.

What are the Legion's values?

I have touched on some of these already, but I would like to add some of my own, such as: "Always do the right thing, embrace change, support and respect each other, pursue diversity and, finally, live our mission."

What are the major issues facing veterans today – and how does the Legion help?

There are far too many to list and they're all very complex. Chronic health conditions, housing, financial insecurity, transition to civilian life, substance abuse, loneliness, social isolation, homelessness, and physical and mental health come to mind. The current strategic review will refocus our funding on more casework and personalised support, more collaboration with external partners

providing specialist services and more investment in our Care Homes and services for older members of the Armed Forces community.

Do you have a message for our 230,000+ members?

All through my active Service, it was drilled into me that there are no 'problems', only 'challenges'. Challenges can be overcome by the application of the many 'Cs' in life, namely: Celebrating each other and who we are; Confidence and Conviction in our many achievements over the years; Commitment, which grows from our unwavering desire as members to contribute to the long-term success of the Legion; Connecting and Collaborating with each other, which frequently reinforces our solidarity and enduring friendships; Competence, Capacity and Capability in all we do to deliver support and comfort to our beneficiaries; and finally, Caring and Compassion, which embodies our culture to always do our utmost to help those in need.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK



A woman welcomes home her daughter after she was demobbed from the Women's Auxiliary Air Force

BADGE OF HONOUR

PERSONAL ACCOUNTS
OF MILITARY EVENTS

LANCE CORPORAL
NEVILLE WILLIAMS
1ST BATTALION,
WELCH REGIMENT, KOREA

1951-52

"A BIG LUMP OF
SHRAPNEL LANDED
ABOUT A FOOT
FROM WHERE MY
HEAD WAS JUST
SECONDS BEFORE"



As a teenager growing up in Chester, I'd heard bombs drop and windows rattle during the Second World War – and we even had two evacuees from

Liverpool live with us for two or three years.

I deferred my National Service to complete my apprenticeship as an engineer at Chester Hydraulic. I was very physically active, so when I was called up, aged 21, in January 1951, I volunteered to go into the Royal Welch Fusiliers in the hope of becoming a physical-training instructor. My father had also served with the regiment during the First World War; he was a soldier in India and among the first troops into France. He was wounded three separate times, and not many people survive that sort of thing.

The way it worked out, after initial training, the Army was picking people for Korea. I was transferred to the Welch Regiment after the first six weeks and that's where I stayed for the rest of my Service. In those days, the Welsh Brigade was made up of the Welch Regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the South Wales Borderers. While we didn't know for certain that we were going to be deployed to Korea, we had an inkling – we went off to Norfolk to do battle training and it was pretty serious stuff. We fired every weapon you could think of and were out on five-day schemes with live rounds and grenades. Our deployment was confirmed in September 1951; nobody was happy about it, but that was it. We set sail from Southampton, landing in Pusan [now Busan] in November, and it was the following November when we came back – 12 months was the maximum you could do in Korea.

It was a very simple country back then. We stopped in Pusan for a few days before going up to the Front by train. It was a shanty town, and Seoul, which was near the 38th parallel, wasn't much better. It was a hilly country – a bit like Wales – and the houses were wattle and daub; they were really primitive.

I was posted to the uplands that overlooked the Samichon river and occupied a position nicknamed Pioneer Hill. It was about 500 feet high and we were in a bunker right on the top, although it was only a big hole when we got there. I was a regimental signaller and my job was to set up a telephone exchange with lines to all the different companies. A lot of my time, though, was spent repairing lines if they got blown apart by shell fire. I could get called out at any time, regardless of the conditions.

**Left: Neville today
Below: With Welch
Regiment friend
Jim Sebeon (right);
Neville and Jim were
in a boxing team
together in Korea**

The climate was pretty awful. It was -42°C in the winter, there were monsoons during the spring and then you've got the hot summers. It was a pretty difficult place to survive, especially when you're living in a hole. In the winter, the ground froze four or five feet deep. I was attached to the Assault Pioneers then – a platoon that would go out and blow up unexploded bombs – and they had to do a lot of blasting to get some of the sentries and bunkers built. If you were in a field cookhouse on the side of the hill and you didn't drink your tea within minutes, it would literally freeze. You had to keep eating – most people put on a fair bit of weight as it was the only way to keep warm. I was working all night sometimes and when not doing guard duty, we'd inspect each other's noses for frostbite to keep ourselves awake. When you're in dry cold, you get to a point where you haven't much feeling, so it can catch up on you without you knowing.

We were there for four months and I then got transferred to the Three-inch Mortar Platoon just below Hill 355 – this was the biggest hill in the line and had seen an awful lot of fighting. There were many artillery exchanges there and I nearly caught it a few times in different ways. It was heavy-going, but everybody got stuck in. There was a job to be done and we worked well.

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"TO KEEP OURSELVES AWAKE, WE'D INSPECT EACH OTHER'S NOSES FOR FROSTBITE"

giving the Chinese a lot of stick. They must have worked out where we were, as enemy shells started to drop all around us. I heard a 'zip' noise and dived; a big lump of shrapnel landed about a foot from where my head was just seconds before. When it's as close as that, you don't need to be told to get your head down. We shot up to the top of the hill and sat it out in their bunker for a couple of hours. The next day, we went out to repair the lines; the enemy had created a lot of work because some of the shells had hit points where there were eight lines running down a trench all together.

I didn't physically encounter the enemy until I had to arrest some prisoners. We got a call one day to say that there were some North Koreans or Chinese – we couldn't tell, as they were dressed like North Koreans – and it was all right for them to pass through. I enquired with those higher up and they said, 'It must be the enemy.' I was the officer on site and quickly got together six of the lads and said, 'Stick some grenades in your belts and bring your guns with rounds in.'

There were six chaps. It was a bit heated. Our machine gunner had his gun on them, but the enemy still had their weapons and grenades. It didn't look very good and when they saw us, they were agitated. I said to my men, 'Pick one apiece and when I say go, move in and disarm them.' I told the machine gunner that if they resisted, he should shoot the leader. We moved in very quickly and they didn't know what to do. We disarmed them, marched them back to headquarters and handed them over. It was a bit tricky; halfway there they started taking their hands off their heads, so I said to the lads, 'Operate the bolts on your rifle – if they run, they'll go across the paddy fields, so just shoot them in the legs.' They realised the game was up. Years later, when my book came out, an intelligence officer wrote to me and said that he'd heard they had got an awful lot of information from the prisoners. He said that if we'd known >>



mortars, the enemy would work out where we were and return it. They would very often choose mealtimes to drop a few shells and you got used to knowing from the sound of them where they were going to land. Mortar bombs are more dangerous because they fly around; if you get a shell, the shrapnel goes forward. As long as it drops behind you, unless it's very close, it's not as dangerous. If a shell is going over the top, it makes a screaming sound – we got used to thinking, 'That's well up, it's going to land about 100 yards away.'

I had one incident, though, when we were laying barbed wire alongside the mortar bay and a shell dropped within three feet of us at the back of a bomb bay. When it's close like that, you feel the air pressure – literally a 'zunk'. You don't need to be told to dive. We used to dig quite a lot of slit trenches on the sides for this purpose and the three of us jumped into one straight away – you can imagine what the last man said.

I had another near miss when repairing lines on Hill 355. Our people had been

Top: A group photo of the Commonwealth Brigade battalions; Neville is second from left
Above left: Training at East Wretham, pictured on left with fellow soldiers Jim Sebeon and Jim Lamcraft
Above right: Neville was awarded the Korea Medal and the United Nations Service Medal for Korea



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"IT WAS A BIT HEATED. OUR MACHINE GUNNER HAD HIS GUN, BUT THE ENEMY STILL HAD WEAPONS AND GRENADES, AND THEY WERE AGITATED"

the full story, I might have even received an MID [Mentioned in Dispatches] because of it.

Overall, there was a lot of comradeship – one of the main things was to survive with your mates, which included our Korean porter comrades, who were among the bravest and hardest-working men I ever met. There were quite a few injuries just because of the conditions. It's the nature of war. By the end of our period in Korea, our battalion saw about 30 killed and 100-odd injured.

After my National Service, I returned to engineering and eventually moved from tradesman to training officer. During the last 20 years of my career, I was a chief safety officer, first with British Leyland and then with British Aerospace.

I was inspired to write my book after a holiday in Switzerland with my wife Joan in 1995. We were going to Engelberg, which is a little town just outside Lucerne, and sitting on the train opposite us was a Korean man with his wife. We were talking – he was an engineer as well – and I said, 'I was in your country in 1951.' He jumped up and shook



Below: Pusan War Cemetery, now the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, contains 2,300 graves of casualties from the Korean War

my hand, and said, 'I wouldn't have had a college education if the communists had got to the bottom of Korea.' On returning from our holiday, we went to the Imperial War Museum and on the way out, Joan said, 'There's a picture of you in one of the show cases.' During my Service, I'd been picked to go and have my photograph taken and I'd been promised a copy of it but never got one. It turned out that it had been used for the 1952 Commonwealth Christmas card, which had been donated to the museum 50 years later. It got me thinking that I'd write up my experiences. The nicest part was, when my book was published, I got letters from people I'd been in Korea with, and also other soldiers who had been out there.

One of the things that Korea did for me was made me realise my full potential. The way I looked at it, I was shelled and shot at for £2 a week, and when I got back, a lot of the things that people said were hard work, I didn't consider hard work. That set me in good stead for the rest of my life."

***A Conscript in Korea* by Neville Williams (Pen & Sword, £12.99) is available now.**





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LOST TRAILS

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» An officer and a gentleman

Mick Gray needs help identifying this dashing young officer (name unknown). The mystery man served in the Second World War and was awarded the 39-45 Star, France and Germany Star, Defence and War medals. Ring any bells?

Contact: mick_7103@yahoo.co.uk



» Seeking Swinderby friends

Roy Stewart (seated, far right) sent us this photo taken during basic training at RAF Swinderby in 1965. He'd love to hear from anyone from that time, especially Alex Maxwell (standing, third from left) and Ken Murray.

Contact: roystewart23@yahoo.co.uk

» Horton's honour

D-Day veteran Percy Vincent Horton received this splendid card from two young boys and their mum (all pictured) while attending a memorial service in Bayeux last year. He's very attached to the card – so much so that it now means more to him than his Légion d'honneur medal – but here's the catch: he needs help tracking the family down so he can express his gratitude. Percy thinks the boys' mum – who might be the mayor of Bayeux's wife – was sitting behind HRH The Prince of Wales and several other dignitaries during the service. Can you help?

Contact: dfairclough@britishlegion.org.uk



LOST AND FOUND

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LETTERS

Our National Chairman writes, plus a proud wife and a Sapper remembered

LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS AND BRANCHES

Following our recent strategic review (in particular, the closure of Break Centres and the Handy Van Service), we have received several questions from members and branches. Our National Chairman has written the following response, which aims to address all of these points.

Thank you for writing to the Legion regarding the recent strategy review announcements. We do understand our members' loyalties to our services.

The people we support, the Legion and other military charities are facing significant challenges and changing demands. Since 2016, we have seen an increase in calls to our Contact Centre of more than 20 per cent and an increase in the average value of the grants we make to individuals and families of more than 40 per cent.

On 23 January, the Board of Trustees considered the proposals to close Break Centres and the Handy Van Service, and we understand the loyalty attached to both. Following the consultation process with employees, taking into account feedback received through this process and from other stakeholders, the decision was taken to cease operating both Break Centres and the Handy Van Service. The new strategy will ensure the Legion is having the greatest impact for the people we support, making

the most of our resources, and evolving in line with changes in the Armed Forces community.

We believe we can do more good by focusing on other services. We know we need to spend about £5 million more each year on providing the great care offered in our Care Homes. We want to spend more through our Individual Needs Grants, as those can be used to address the specific needs with which people come to us.

In relation to the membership being consulted, the Board of Trustees is responsible for the overall strategic direction, governance and management of

the Legion. More than half of the Board of Trustees is made up of members elected by the Legion branches, so you, the members, are well represented.

It is important to note that our Break Centres are not set up to provide respite care or mental health services. We can offer the former through our Care Homes and the latter are clinically governed, with Combat Stress leading in this area. As part of the review, we have considered the other roles our Break Centres do and could play and how those needs can be best met, and have reviewed any proposals following the consultation process.

Some of you have raised with me the matter of the outsourcing of membership. The outsourcing company offers much wider services than we were able to provide members with previously. For example, they can process card payments online and over the phone – something that members themselves were requesting for years. The cost of setting up the systems and equipment required to process such payments

in-house would have been much higher than entering into an agreement with an external provider that already has these systems in place.

The take-up in new payment methods is significant, which means that most members are happy with the options that we are now able to offer. Recently, we have also introduced further improvements that will reduce the amount of time it takes to send out membership cards, meaning that members will get them much more quickly.

In addition, we have been asked about the changes to welfare provision and the centralisation of everything through a call centre. The Contact Centre was created to respond to beneficiaries' needs, providing consistent advice, 12 hours a day, seven days

a week. Many people who approach the Legion for support simply need information and advice; the Contact Centre advisors are able to help them at the time of their call. If the Contact Centre is unable to help or the inquiry needs to be referred to an agency that is better placed, the beneficiary is introduced to the relevant Area Office, which will provide targeted 'on the ground' support.

Branch Community Support was introduced not just so that we could capture, through reporting, the great work that branches do in the local community, but to ensure that members are well supported and trained in delivering local community support.

It is important that, when visiting vulnerable people, our members are aware of GDPR, Safeguarding and Lone Working processes. Attendance at the one-day face-to-face training ensures that they are fully conversant with the wide range of Legion services and also build a good relationship with their Area Teams. By doing this, we can all be confident about the work that our branches do at the heart of their communities.

While we appreciate that branch members may be disappointed with our new strategy, we hope this provides you with more background as to why these changes are being made.

Una Cleminson
National Chairman



**“WE BELIEVE
WE CAN DO
MORE GOOD
BY FOCUSING
ON OTHER
SERVICES”**



Volunteer and RAF veteran Mrs Scott with Sainsbury's Sue Oliver

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

My husband is 83 years old and is an ex-RAF veteran from the 1950s; he served mainly abroad between 1954 and 1959. We have a severely disabled son who is 15 years old and cannot walk, talk or do anything for himself, and my husband is devoted to him. He is himself disabled, having had about 56 operations following a hit and run in his 30s. He has always been a keen charity volunteer, collecting in the past for Guide Dogs and deaf/dumb children. He has raised tens of thousands of pounds over the years.

Nowadays, he concentrates on collecting for the Legion, which he has done now for almost 18 years at our local Sainsbury's. He normally spends about a week there during the Poppy Appeal, after months of preparation! He has raised more than £100,000.

I would dearly like him to receive the credit he deserves for this. I know he adores doing it to help the veterans who have suffered like him. It

would be wonderful for him to receive the proper recognition.
Mrs B Scott, via email

A PROUD DAUGHTER

In February 1944, Allied bombers attacked the historical monastery at Monte Cassino, Italy, a sanctuary founded by St Benedict 14 centuries before. Witnessing this carnage was my beloved father, who was in the thick of the devastation.

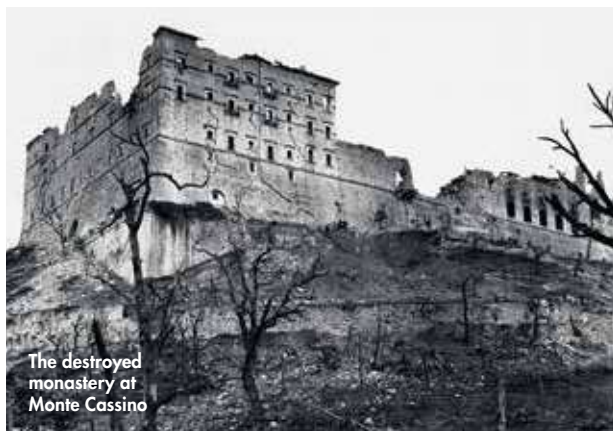
Today, the monastery has been restored. I was fortunate to visit, but the knowledge of my father and his involvement in that dreadful battle made the trip very poignant. When I went to the British cemetery, the first grave to meet my gaze was Sgt Jack Preston of the Coldstream Guards, and the tears flowed. My father was Sgt Jack Preston ('Preston' with one 's'), a Sapper, Royal Engineers, who, I thank God, returned home and produced me. The first time he held me he said, "A new life for a new world", and became the father that every child deserves. My

father was at Monte Cassino for the 60th anniversary. Accompanied by the Legion Standard, he placed a wreath and saluted his namesake who never returned home.

Sadly, Sapper Jack Preston is no longer with us. I take immense pride in wearing his medals and cap with the badge he was given when he joined up as a regular in 1938. I march at the Cenotaph with the Monte Cassino Society.

As the years pass, fewer of our brave veterans are with us, but we will always have the privilege of meeting them. The Battle of Monte Cassino is always overlooked, and we in the Society endeavour to rectify that. Those brave men who took part in D-Day must never be forgotten. After all, their help was the key to the end of the war and to our freedom. At the same time, Monte Cassino must be remembered. My late father and his comrades must be remembered. Please do not let them be forgotten.

Dianne Preston, 'a fiercely proud Sapper's daughter', via email



The destroyed monastery at Monte Cassino



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VE Day 75 years on

This year, on May 8, a special programme of events will take place across the United Kingdom to commemorate Allied Victory in Europe and pay tribute to the Second World War generation who served at home and overseas.

Over the bank holiday weekend, as we remember the heroes of the Second World War, Winston Churchill's victory speech will once again resound across the country just as it did 75 years ago. It is scheduled to be rebroadcast in public spaces as part of the VE Day 75th anniversary commemorations. The new £5 Coin issued to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day fittingly depicts Churchill in his own words, taken from that victory speech.

However we choose to mark the occasion, this year's anniversary is a poignant and possibly final opportunity for the nation to give thanks to all those who contributed to a defining moment in history.



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The inspiration behind the VE Day 75th Anniversary £5 Coin: May 8, 1945, Churchill waves to the crowds in Whitehall, on the day he broadcast to the nation that the war with Germany had been won "This is your Victory" he tells the nation.

Churchill £5 Coin issued to mark 75 years since VE Day

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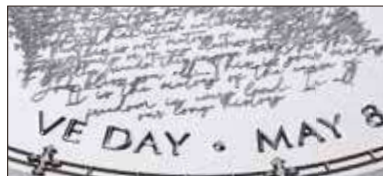
75 Years ago, on May 8, 1945, Churchill addressed the nation, "God bless you all. This is your victory! It is the victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our long history we have never seen a greater day than this". The long-awaited day of peace had come, and the years of hostility in Europe ended.

To mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day in 2020, a new £5 coin has been issued — the VE

Day 75th Anniversary £5 coin. The coin features a portrait of Churchill with his iconic V for Victory sign. Implementing an ingenious minting technique his portrait is made from the words of his speech as he addressed the nation on VE Day.

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Address

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Signature

*P&P: Delivery Shipping & Service | Finish: Layered in fine 999 Silver | Diameter: 38.61mm | Issuing Authority: The Government of Alderney | Applicants must be aged 18 or over | Applications are limited to one coin per UK household | Each of the remaining five coins will be sent every 3-4 weeks to customers to view entirely without obligation at £39.95 (plus £2.99 S&S) | Customers are under no obligation to purchase any of the further five issues in the collection and may cancel at any time | All orders are covered by Bradford Exchange's 14-day money back guarantee. Our guarantee is in addition to the rights provided to you by consumer protection regulations | Please note, we may contact you via mail, email and mobile with information about your reservation. For details of our privacy policy, please go to www.bradford.co.uk/privacy-policy or contact us at the above address or phone number | The Bradford Exchange | 1 Castle Yard, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6TF | Registered company number FC014346 | 426-C032701A



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