

THE ROYAL BRITISH

LEGION

SEPTEMBER 2020



VJ DAY 75

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THE ROYAL BRITISH
LEGION



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A FORCE FOR GOOD

Throughout this extraordinary year, it has given me great comfort to be part of an organisation that dedicates itself to remembering and caring for our Armed Forces and the communities they serve. COVID-19 has turned lives upside down, but the Legion continues to work tirelessly in support of its members. And considering the uncertain conditions we face, the teamwork involved in arranging our recent VJ75 celebrations was outstanding. I hope you enjoyed the event as much as I did – do read our coverage of the day on page 18, where we pay tribute to the British and Commonwealth forces

who were crucial to the victory in the Far East and helped to make Britain the multicultural community it is today.

It is of great importance that we recognise the contribution of Commonwealth Service men and women to our country, both in years gone by and more recently, which is why we are also giving you an update on our Stop the Service Charge campaign. Currently, ex-Service people from the Commonwealth face incredibly high fees to remain in this country with their loved ones. This is a financial burden that causes great hardship and distress, and quite frankly, these veterans deserve better. Find out about our fight to get this changed and how you can help on page 32.

It seems apt, after expressing my pride in all the Legion can achieve, to also be calling for the stories of your branches from the past 100 years. We would not be the Legion without all of you, so we want you to delve into your histories and share them with us to help celebrate our centenary next year. On page 26, we talk to Dan Hill, the historian who is compiling our amazing archive, a selection of which will be exhibited at our 2021 Annual Conference. Please do contribute – we can't do it without you.

Since I last wrote to you, I have enjoyed being able to get out and about again as some lockdown restrictions have eased. Virtual meetings have worked well, but the lack of human contact has been hard for many of us, and I hope that over the rest of the year we can continue to move towards safely meeting up once more.

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: Petty Naval Officer Mohammed Saeed is remembered by his grandson, Mubarak Chowdry
Above: Shawn McPherson and Danielle Deller tell their story as we fight to Stop the Service Charge for Commonwealth veterans

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SEPTEMBER 2020

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BENJAMIN WAREING



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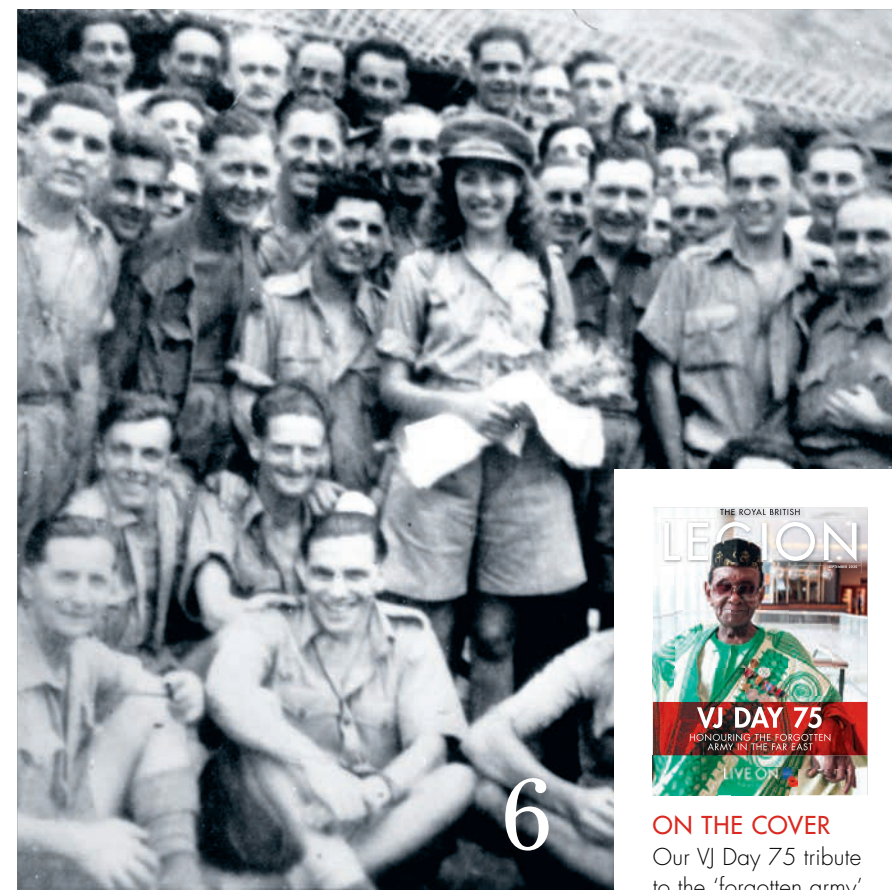


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"I WANTED TO DO MY BIT"

Dame Vera Lynn, the 'Forces' Sweetheart' Remembered by Lord Ashcroft, KCMG PC

The film footage taken on 14 May 1944 is remarkable. It shows Dame Vera Lynn sitting on the driver's footstep of an Army truck with troops of the Fourteenth Army in what was then India, close to the Burmese border.

Smiling and looking relaxed, wearing a WAAF cap and an officer's tunic and shorts, she is seen chatting to British and Burmese Karen soldiers. In another clip from the same day, she signs autographs for Servicemen on pieces of paper and the rims of their slouch hats, worn for protection from the hot sun.

With her passing, we have lost a much-loved singer, songwriter and entertainer, who was a colossal inspiration during the Second World War.

Her trip to Burma, India and Egypt at the height of the war typified her courageous approach to her wartime role, and it says a great deal about why she was so admired.

Dame Vera had asked where she would be most appreciated and where others from the Entertainments National Service Association had not dared venture. The answer was Japanese-occupied Burma and also India – the Fourteenth Army had become known as the

'Forgotten Army'. Without hesitating, Dame Vera said that she was happy to go.

She later said: "I was just 27 years old when I went to Burma. It was an experience that changed my life for ever. Up until that time I had not really travelled anywhere at all, apart from one touring visit to Holland... and I had certainly never been in an aeroplane. But I wanted to make a difference, to do my bit."

In March 1944, Dame Vera went to Shamshernagar airfield in Bengal to entertain British troops before the Battle of Kohima. Her host and lifelong friend, Captain Bernard Holden, paid tribute to "her courage and her contribution to morale".

She went on to give a series of outdoor concerts to troops in India, Burma and Egypt. In her 2017 book, *Keep Smiling Through: My Wartime Story*, she recalled how, on one occasion, thousands of troops somehow emerged from the jungle to hear her sing in a clearing.

Dame Vera was a true national treasure, a working-class girl from the East End who became the voice of a nation. We remember her with pride and affection, for she is much missed.

For more information on Lord Ashcroft, visit lordashcroft.com

PHOTOGRAPHY: EVERETT COLLECTION/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

SINCERELY OURS

Dame Vera Lynn, the 'Forces' Sweetheart' and a tireless supporter of the Legion, sadly passed away on 18 June at the age of 103. "We have been privileged to work closely with Dame Vera," says Charles Byrne, Director General. "The comfort and solace she brought to the nation and our troops during the Second World War, and her commitment to the welfare of veterans, cannot be overestimated."

She was born Vera Margaret Welch in 1917 in East Ham, London; her father worked as a plumber and her mother was a dressmaker. In 1939, she recorded *We'll Meet Again* for the first time, and in 1941, she began the *Sincerely Yours, Vera Lynn* show on the Forces Programme. After the war, she supported the Legion on many occasions, helping to launch the Poppy Appeal in 1999 alongside the Spice Girls, and regularly attending the Festival of Remembrance. "She will always have a special place in the hearts of the Legion," says Charles. "Her motto, 'keep smiling through', is truly encouraging in times of peace and adversity. Dame Vera was a British icon and inspiration to us all."

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The 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War was commemorated on 25 June. In 1950, North Korea, backed by communist China and the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea. After the United Nations asked for members to defend South Korea, British and Commonwealth troops were deployed. Over the following three years of fighting, our Armed Forces would suffer 4,092 casualties.

This year, Roy Painter (above), a veteran of the conflict, was touched to receive a delivery. The 70th

Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee, based in Seoul, had donated masks to every surviving veteran they could locate. "When you risked your life in a strange land filled with gunfire, the strange people you saved were our grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers or mothers," the letter read. "People around the world are suffering from and having difficulty due to the global pandemic of COVID-19... We are especially concerned about the wellbeing of you who dedicated your youth to protecting the Republic of Korea."

HAS COMPENSATION AFFECTED YOUR BENEFITS?

Some veterans in receipt of compensation for Service-attributable injuries who are also claiming means-tested Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Housing Benefit or Pension Credit can be subject to a '£10 disregard'. This means that veterans can keep only the first £10 of their compensation, with the rest treated as 'income' when their entitlement to benefits is assessed. For example, an ex-Service person who is in receipt of a War Pension worth £71 per week would receive just £49.75 per week in ESA, despite being entitled to £110.75. This is because the value of their weekly War Pension is deducted from their ESA entitlement, except for the £10 that is disregarded and not considered income. This rule also applies to other benefits, such as Council Tax Reduction, and varies by local authority.

If this has happened to you, the Legion would like to hear from you. Your stories help to build a picture of the scale of the problem and the impact it has on veterans' lives. Contact publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk – your details will be kept secure and can be anonymised if you wish.

VJ DAY 75 IN THAILAND

The Chonburi Thailand Branch of the Legion hosted a commemorative service on 15 August, marking VJ Day 75 at the Chungkai War Cemetery just outside the town of Kanchanaburi, Thailand, also known as the home of the 'Bridge over the River Kwai'.

Wreaths were laid by the Dutch and UK Ambassadors and the Defence Attachés, and the Branch Chairman, Bob Mann, read the Exhortation. Recognition was also paid to the Asian forced labourers on the Death Railway, many of whom gave their lives in the effort.

The guest of honour was Khun Sangniam (right), now 94 years old. In 1945, she tended the graves at the cemeteries while working for the Graves Registration Unit and what was then known as the Imperial War Graves Commission. She laid a wreath with help from two Commonwealth War Graves Commission staffers.

See page 18 for more about how the Legion commemorated the anniversary of VJ Day.





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LAMBOURN BRANCH STEPS UP

Over the years, the premises of the Lambourn Royal British Legion Club have been used by rehearsing handbell ringers, the Brownies, mother and baby groups, and the Methodist Friends, to name just a few. Proud of its position at the heart of the community, during lockdown, the branch was able to provide a home for a sadly vital service: the Lambourn

Junction, a food bank that dispenses food, clothes, toys and cleaning products to 150 households from the local area.

"Under our usual remit, if a Legion member falls on hard times, we help out," says Ian Bradford, Club Secretary. "In this situation, all sorts of people have been affected and need to use the Junction's services. It takes courage to walk through those doors. The Committee agreed unanimously that the hall should be used."

Originally, the food bank operated out of Lambourn's Memorial Hall, but they had to vacate the space in early June. Anna Field, Lead Coordinator for the Junction and a Legion member, asked if the club could help out.

Ian, who spent 37 years in the RAF and has been a Legion member since 1997, says: "It's right there in the rule book – we are a benefit of the community society. So that's what we're doing as the Legion; we're doing our bit in a time of great need."



NEW REMEMBRANCE GLADE TO OPEN AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

A new Remembrance Glade developed by the Legion's Remembrance team and the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) will open for the first time to the public this autumn. The Glade was conceived as a way for visitors to the NMA to reflect on what Remembrance means to them in an environment of symbolic plants and features.

The planting has been designed to provide interest with the changing of the seasons, with each plant chosen to represent a different aspect of Remembrance,

such as spring narcissus for new beginnings, ilex for protection and simple white anemones for sadness. At the centre of the Glade is a reflective sculpture where visitors can sit quietly to remember a loved one, take in the surroundings, or to think about the Service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces. To complement the Glade, there will be educational resources for children aged 4-18 (see right), as well as community engagement packs to inspire groups and communities in their Remembrance activities.

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

As the national champion of Remembrance, the Royal British Legion has a key role in ensuring that Remembrance is understood and passed on to future generations. To achieve this, it has to be made engaging and relevant to children, so we have created a range of educational resources (initially for Key Stages 1-4, but also for Key Stage 5) for them to learn in the classroom and at home. These will come in a variety of formats, including book clubs, lessons, assemblies and arts projects. Created in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and others, the resources work alongside the curriculum, enabling teachers, parents and families to bring Remembrance to life. The Legion's Remembrance team is also working with the Guides and the Cadets to deliver a set of activities in time for this Remembrancetide.

To download the packs for free, visit www.rbl.org.uk/teachingremembrance



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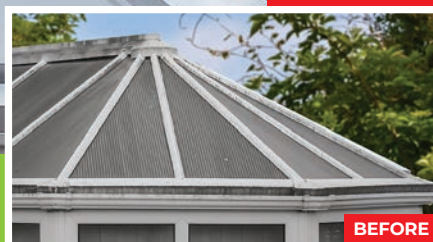
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MY LEGION

"IN 2019, WE RAISED \$14,000 FOR THE POPPY APPEAL"

Hon. James Janmohamed OBE JP(S) is the President of the Belize Branch, and resides with his wife Jamila on the island of Ambergris Caye. They raise funds for the Poppy Appeal by hosting five-course dinners, and occasionally entertain royalty

I joined the Junior Leaders' Regiment of the Royal Armoured Corps in 1971 and passed out to the 17th/21st Lancers, where I reached the rank of Tank Commander, having completed 11 years. I made tremendous friends – we were and are still like family. When I left, I missed them; having spent a long time in close proximity, you know each other well.

I met my wife Jamila towards the end of my military career, but she was scared of soldiers (or so she said), so she wouldn't marry me until I left the Army. We were both born in Uganda, in East Africa; I came to England in 1969 with my mother and sister, and Jamila and the rest of the family came in the 1970s, fleeing Idi Amin. We moved to Belize in 1985. I'd had a bad accident in the Army and suffered osteoarthritis. I think my doctor was sick of seeing me during winter, so he said, 'James, either you move to a warmer climate, or I'm moving.' I'd been stationed in Belize before, so I thought, why not?

I first joined the Legion as a serving soldier in Bovington, Dorset; we were honorary members then. Any soldier will tell you that we like to take care of our own, so the Legion was a great organisation to be a part of. A friend

of mine belonged to Belize Branch, and when he was leaving the country, he asked me to take over the Poppy Appeal fundraising. With our energetic Chairman, Guy Howinson; tireless Secretary, Shawn Wright; and the rest of the great committee, the branch is performing excellently.

There are significant expat and military communities in the country. The British Army Training Support Unit Belize (BATSUB) hosts training exercises for troops. We host our meetings in their mess and they invite us to their club. We have also had some royal visits over the years.

I'm Honorary Consul for the British High Commission; Belize is a Commonwealth country and we have a great deal of love for the Royal Family and HM The Queen.

Previously, the Poppy Appeal here would raise \$200-\$300. Jamila took over in 2004 and had the idea to host a black-tie, five-course dinner of Indian food. The first year, we raised about \$1,000 and that's grown every year; in 2019, it was \$14,000. Jamila cooks all the food herself, with one woman helping. It's amazing.

I think everyone really looks forward to the dinner now. We feed about 150 people each

year, and also host raffles and collect on the street all November. We know it'll be a challenge this year; COVID-19 has stopped all tourism, the mainstay of the island, so everyone is hurting. Right now, we're distributing items to families in need. Hopefully, things will be better by November. It'll be a challenge, but we'll still do our best."



James and Jamila at their annual fundraising dinner for the Legion



James and Jamila greet Prince Harry on a royal visit in 2012

Al wears medals awarded during his RAF career

At the end of recruit training at RAF Swinderby in 1969

LIVE ON 17

TO ALL WHO SERVED, WE THANK YOU

On 15 August, the nation paid tribute to the British and Commonwealth Tri-Service Forces, whose extraordinary efforts brought about an end to the war with Japan 75 years ago. Here's how the Legion remembered

“

To all who served, we thank you.” This was the central message of this year's VJ Day commemorations on the 75th anniversary of the surrender of Japan. Heads of state across the Commonwealth and the world – including from the UK, the US, Nigeria, Ghana and Fiji – were broadcast saying these exact words, reflecting the diversity of the forces that came together in the Asia-Pacific region to finally bring an end to the Second World War.

The principal fighting force in the region, the Fourteenth Army, commanded by Field Marshal Sir William Slim, consisted of units from all corners of the Commonwealth, with more than 40 languages spoken. Slim's descendants were among those who spoke at the Legion-hosted event at the National Memorial Arboretum on 15 August, which was broadcast live by the BBC.

The stories of those who served were placed centre stage on the day, and we heard about the men who built the bridge over the River Kwai, the Chindits, and Pacific Star and Burma Star veterans, alongside women who, as teenagers, were interned in horrific circumstances.

KT Lwin from Rangoon, who served in the British Royal Volunteer Naval Reserve (RVNR), recalled: “After Japan occupied Burma, the Japanese were very atrocious and our people were not happy. They wanted to join with the British to fight back the Japanese. I am proud to belong to the RVNR because without their help and support, we could not have got the Japanese out of the way.”

In a particularly affecting section, serving personnel read out accounts written by soldiers who fought in the Far East. “Gunshots rang out from the opposite bank. We all ran for cover,” read Corporal Fatai Ajose from the memoirs of Private Isaac Fadoyebo, who served with the Royal West African Frontier Force, about an ambush on the Kaladan River in 1944, in which he very nearly died.

In place of huge crowds, people strolled and sat quietly. In attendance were 40 veterans and their carers, plus 104 first-generation descendants. For the main event, guests sat far from each other among the trees, scattered around the Far East corner of the arboretum.

The dappled setting was disturbed by the thunder of a Lancaster bomber, trailing a Hurricane and three Spitfires as it made its fly-past. As the low rumbling died away, Les Wills, who was a young sailor on HMS *Indefatigable* on VJ Day, read his account. “We sailed on rough seas in enemy waters. On 1 April, we were the first Royal Navy ship to be hit by a kamikaze attack. I was positioned in the gun towers and unable to see it. But the sounds and smells portrayed to me the chaos and destruction above. The

Opposite: Sergeant Mohammed Hussain, who fought in Italy in the 6th DCO Lancers, part of the Indian 8th Division, with his grandson at the VJ

Day 75 commemorations at the National Memorial Arboretum on 15 August
Below: Sir Bryn Terfel was among the performers at the BBC's evening show

smell of cordite still lives with me. Strangely, we felt safe. The commanders were tenacious.”

The Kohima Epitaph was recited by one of four brothers who, alongside their father, all served in the RAF in the Second World War. The Prime Minister gave the Exhortation on behalf of the nation before HRH The Prince of Wales brought the event to a close.

The BBC followed its live broadcast with a pre-recorded evening show, hosted by Joanna Lumley. This had a more exuberant tone, with massed bands of HM Armed Forces, as well as performances from actors and singers including Sheridan Smith and Sir Willard White.

The commemorations did not shy away from the difficult legacy of the act that brought about Japan's surrender: the atomic bomb. “We were due to be executed on 25 August 1945. And though I regret the bomb being dropped theoretically, I'm really glad they did drop it,” said one veteran, his face projected large on the backdrop of Horse Guards Parade. “I felt some doubt about the use of the terrible weapon,” said another. “I did feel that the genie had been allowed out of the bottle.”

On this VJ Day, there was celebration and joy, but there was also sadness, reflection and trauma that continues to resonate. Burma-campaign and Commonwealth veterans have long spoken of how this period of war has not always been properly recognised. VJ Day 75 was the nation's opportunity to cherish those veterans and to let them know that they are not, and will never be, forgotten.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SHUTTERSTOCK, BBC PICTURES





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"HE COULD SEE OTHER SHIPS ON FIRE. HE WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES"

PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORGE BROOKS

**Mohammed Saeed,
Petty Officer for the British
Royal Indian Navy
Remembered by his grandson,
Mubarik Chowdry**

Mohammed Saeed was born in the village of Malkana Nangla in Hindustan in 1926. He was the youngest of three boys, all of whom fought for the British Empire during the Second World War. Mohammed's two older brothers were encouraged into the British Indian Army by their royalist father, but Mohammed was keen



to join the Royal Navy, and in 1942, as the war ground on, the British were desperately recruiting. "I was 16," he later told his family, "and I was so excited to join."

He was driven by a profound sense of duty, inherited from his father. Mubarik Chowdry, Mohammed's grandson, says, "He was aware of the dangers involved, he knew of many recruits from the Punjab who had been killed, but he didn't hesitate; he knew his duty." His training in Trombay (Mumbai) was rapid. Thankfully, he was a fast learner and picked up his duties quickly, as well as easily mastering the English language.

Mohammed's first posting was to HMIS *Cheetah*, but he was also used on other boats and he learnt to use the cannons. On the *Cheetah* they did training supply work from Southampton, Malta, Singapore and Hong Kong. Mubarik says, "They were pretty much trained on the job. They were told: 'This is what you've got to do and this is how you do it. Right, get on with it!'"

As the war inched towards its conclusion in the Far East, the fighting intensified. Mubarik recalls, "My grandfather said the last year and a half were horrible. You could actually smell the fire; some days it was like smoking with coal, the soot in the air was constant, you could taste it. You could see other ships on fire, going down, but he escaped that; he was one of the lucky ones."

Mubarik's grandfather and great-uncles all returned home safely from the war. Mohammed was awarded the 1938-45 Star with Battle of Britain clasp, the War Medal 1939-1945 and the Burma Star, and went on to serve in the Pakistan Navy for another 24 years. He was an inspiration to his family until his death in 2009, a man who felt that fighting for freedom against the Japanese was the proudest sacrifice he could make.

Mubarik's daughter has plans to start her training to join the Royal Navy next year. >>



Brigadier WA Dimoline, Commander 28th (East African) Brigade in Burma Remembered by his grandson, Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Chambers
Brigadier Dimoline, known as Dimmy, had a career that spanned both World Wars, the formation of the United Nations, four British monarchs and five continents. He left school at the outbreak of the First World War, aged 17, and was commissioned into the King's Liverpool Regiment. "It was the patriotic thing to do at the time," says his grandson, Lieutenant-Colonel (Retd) Mike Chambers, who also made his career in the Army.
In 1923, Brigadier Dimmy was seconded to the West African Frontier Force in Nigeria. This was followed by stints at the Colonial Office and command of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment.
At the start of the Second World War, he

initially commanded brigades in then-Abyssinia and Madagascar, before taking command of the 28th East African Brigade. In November 1944, the brigade left then-Ceylon to travel to Burma. "They were very much part of General Slim's plan to deceive the enemy and force a crossing across the Irrawaddy River," says Mike.
The 28th Brigade took heavy casualties during Japanese counter-attacks but stood firm. Shortly after, the Brigadier was promoted to command 11th (East African) Division, and left Burma for India.
"There were 100,000 African troops in Burma, but histories are thin on their contribution," says Mike. "I think it's important the sacrifices made during the World Wars and the conflicts since then are remembered, and that the African Forces that took part are remembered alongside everybody else."



"CHOLERA, DIPHTHERIA, SMALLPOX, PNEUMONIA, DYSENTERY AND MALARIA STRUCK THE PRISON CAMPS"

Private Leslie Wilfred Rogers Remembered by his son, Keith Rogers
Leslie Rogers was just 20 when he joined the Army in 1939. He spent his 23rd, 24th and 25th birthdays as a Prisoner of War in Asia, first in Singapore, then working on the Burma railway, keeping a detailed diary of his years in captivity. "I promised my mum that I would write it up," says Keith. "I needed a magnifying glass to work out some of the words."
Leslie's excitement at signing up was soon punctured. His troop ship, RMS *Empress of Asia*, arrived offshore in Singapore on 4 February 1942, and was bombed by the Japanese. He was picked up by Australian troops and became a POW on 15 February.
Illness moved through the prison camps like wildfire: cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, pneumonia and dysentery all struck the men. In 1944, Leslie became seriously ill with malaria (which would continue to plague him after the war ended) while working 'up country' on the railway. Mistaken for an escapee while trying to find a doctor, he wrote: "[The officer] kept his rifle hard in the small of my back, and even in my dazed state of mind, I felt shivers run up and down my spine, my stomach was like jelly."
In November 1945, just after returning to England, he met Vera, Keith's mum. "They were happily married for more than 50 years," Keith says. "He was very much a family man – that was the most important priority in his life."

Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Ross Power, 17th Dogra Regiment, Indian Army Remembered by his daughter, Eleanor Holland
Henry Ross Power spent three and a half years as a captive of the Japanese, first in Moulmein and then in Rangoon Gaol, after he and his Company were captured trying to cross the Sittang River in Burma. Eleanor and her mother, aunt and sisters were in Dalhousie in the Himalayas when they heard that he was missing, presumed killed, in 1942. It would be 18 months before it was confirmed that her father was alive.
Henry's diary, which he wrote on scraps of paper and hid in the gaps between the bricks next to his bed, covers the last three months of his imprisonment. It begins on 1 January 1945: "Am not feeling very confident about immediate future... The thought of another Monsoon in here is almost unbearable."
On 25 April, the prisoners set out from Rangoon. With an injured foot and no shoes, Henry marched with his fellow POWs for four nights. Eventually abandoned by their jailers, they still had to deal with aerial attacks by British Hurricanes, who didn't realise who they were bombing. "It was slowly and painfully, my feet badly swollen and sore, that I had hobbled to the hut... but as I heard the third plane approaching, I ran, as fast, I think, as I ever have done in my life," he wrote.
When Henry was reunited with his family, his youngest daughter didn't recognise him. "He was gaunt and grey looking," Eleanor says. "My youngest sister had been four when he left, and she asked me, 'Who is this man?'"
Eleanor, who served in the WRENS for nine years, says the diary helped her to fully understand what her father had gone through. "He'd only told us one or two things," she says. "We didn't understand the horror of it." >>



PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK DAWE, JIM WILEMAN

"THE CAPTAIN TOLD US TO 'UP SPIRITS' AND GAVE US A DOUBLE TOT OF RUM"

**Ruth Barnwell, Captain's Steward,
HMS Quebec, Scotland**
**Also remembering her husband,
Ronald Barnwell, Petty Officer,
Rangoon**

"My brother's mate, whom I used to write to regularly, was on HMS *Hood* in 1941 when it went down and he was killed. My brother and my cousins were already in the Forces, and I said, 'That's it, I'm going to volunteer; I'm going to join the WRENS.' I was 17 and a half."

Ruth was stationed on HMS *Quebec*, four miles out of Inveraray, Argyllshire. "I had to look after the Captain's clothes, his room, his lunch and any dinner parties. I would put my needlework skills to good use on uniforms; I once used blackout curtains to reline a jacket."

On New Year's Eve 1943, Ruth met Ronald Barnwell, then a Wireman Sailor who was at the camp for training. By the time he left for Rangoon in 1944, they were engaged.

Ronald was assigned to HMS *LCH 101* and travelled to Bombay by troopship, before heading on to Cochin. In his own memoirs, Ronald recounted a battle on Rangoon River: "The Gurkhas were parachuted on to the banks of the river the day before. A Naval Captain named Bell, who was in charge of the operation, said that he hoped the Gurkhas would have [overcome the Japanese positions]; otherwise we would be lucky to get out alive! He told us to 'Up Spirits', gave us a double tot of rum and then we set off."

Ruth and Ronald were married for more than 70 years. On Ruth's 90th birthday, they returned to Argyll to plant a tree in honour of their comrades from the war. Ronald passed away in 2018.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL CLEMENT, ALAMY



Private Joseph Hammond, 82nd (West Africa) Division in Burma

Joseph Hammond, 95, from Ghana, was drafted into the West African Frontier Force at 16 years old and joined the war against the Japanese in Burma.

"The Japanese, they were the most ferocious human fighters that I've ever seen. They went near the Irrawaddy River. They were tempted to cross but realised they would be late and we would massacre them, so they changed their minds.

"Sometimes, the fighting became so intense that for three days we could not push them. At the point where we crossed the river at Maubin, we lost six men. When somebody is killed, sometimes you see that person floating on the water, the very water we drank! Sometimes, we were short of food for three or

four days... until a parachute dropped food and ammunition for us.

"We encountered a lot of difficulty from Japanese snipers... The fighting became so intense we could not beat them, so we had to solicit help from the 2nd Light Battery – Artillery. The whole ground was shaking.

"After the victory, the generals addressed all the troops. We defended the British Empire and I feel proud today that I contributed a lot during the war."

After the war, Joseph returned to Ghana. He recently completed a 14-mile walk – two miles every morning for a week (inspired by Captain Tom Moore) – raising more than \$43,000 in funds for workers on the COVID-19 frontline in Africa. HM The Queen has honoured him with a Commonwealth Points of Light award for his outstanding efforts.

100 YEARS OF STORIES

The Legion wants you to tell the stories of your branch and community in its centenary year, and it couldn't be easier to take part

The stories of the branches of The Royal British Legion are as many and individual as the branches themselves. A new project is asking members to send in documents, artefacts and recordings to tell those stories and celebrate the Legion's centenary in 2021.

"The individual branches of The Royal British Legion are each their own tile, if you like, or piece of the mosaic. They each add to this incredibly diverse and passionate

picture of the organisation as a whole.” So says Dan Hill, a historian working with the Legion on the Telling Our Story project. A team at the Legion will archive and organise submissions, with a selection to be displayed at the Annual Conference 2021. Branches and counties will also have access to the archive for their own use.

"I'm a historian, so a lot of my job is sharing people's history and trying to learn their story," Dan says. "But when it comes to The

Royal British Legion, if you're looking for people with passion, dedication and drive to share a story, you need look no further than the membership themselves."

All contributions are welcome for Telling Our Story – and here are a few themes that might inspire you in your research:

The people

From major national figures to community and branch stalwarts
“The people are the Legion,” says

Stories to celebrate from the past 100 years, clockwise from bottom left: Andy Barlow GM at The Royal British Legion Complex Trauma Gym, part-funded by the Legion and opened to patients in 2018; the founders of the Poppy Factory in 1922; local branch founder George Arthur Roberts, who served in the First World War and was a firefighter in the Second; the comradeship the Legion offers is a special part of its appeal to members; a British Legion street-collector's pass from 1923

TELL YOUR STORY

To contribute to the project,
send us your story and
photographs at

**www.rbl.org.uk/
tellingourstory**

by the end of
September



PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE VARMAN, MARK ALLAN, SHUTTERSTOCK. MARY EVANS

Dan simply. “We’re asking members to look back into their own personal recollections, and to people they crossed paths with along their Legion journey. They might want to tell us about a founding member of their branch, or a particularly passionate one, like somebody who went to Remembrance Day activities 50 years in a row. It could also be their own motivation for joining. It’s an invitation to bring the story of the Legion to life through the people who’ve cared so much about it.”

Poppies in production

The history of the poppy and Legion fundraising campaigns

The poppy is not only an emblem for national Remembrance, it's also intertwined with the story of the Legion. Dan hopes that some very old poppies and collecting tins will emerge, as well as the tales behind local Poppy Appeals. "The poppy is present throughout everything the Legion does, but it also serves as the main tool for engaging with the community," he says.

The Remembrance Day Service

A focus on the history and act of commemoration at national and local levels

“Remembrance Day for me is three things,” says Dan. “It’s an individual, it’s a local and it’s a national event. We know nationally what the story is, but we want to understand the importance at a local level and to individuals. You might have 100 people around a war memorial on Remembrance Day, remembering »



Above: Poppy Collector Tariq Malik
Below: Servicemen playing wheelchair basketball at the Battle Back Centre



100 different things. Photographs, articles, personal memories of Remembrance – these can give a rich sense of its meaning.”

The Legion on the move

Helping people to find work and develop skills

“The key here is the practical involvement that the Legion has,” says Dan. “There have been a great number of local and national initiatives over the years to help people into work.” Members can also look back at the practical impact the Legion has had on their own lives and put forward stories about members helping one another.

The Legion and its worldwide community

Reaching across cultural and age boundaries and showing how involved

“IT COULD BE AS SIMPLE AS THE STORY OF GOING TO A LEGION CLUB AND HAVING A BEER”

the Legion is in community projects

“Even in the founding days of the Legion,” says Dan, “there were incredibly powerful occasions, such as the great pilgrimage of 1928, when the Legion took thousands of ex-Servicemen and their loved ones back to the battlefields of the Western Front. Today, you have Legion members who engage with local schools and communities,

across all races, backgrounds and faiths. It highlights the fact that it’s a totally inclusive organisation that welcomes everyone.” He hopes to see photograph albums of early battlefield visits, journals, diaries and personal recollections of engaging with other communities.

Trauma and rehabilitation

Assisting veterans in their community

Dan describes two aspects to this section: firstly, the formal support for veterans if they have been wounded or injured in Service, such as the work of the Battle Back Centre and similar organisations. And secondly, “the less well understood but equally important aspect of informal rehabilitation,” he says. “This could be as simple as the story of going to a local Legion club and sitting in the bar having a

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUART WOOD, ALAMY, GARY MOVES

beer together. It’s the story in the 1960s of the Great War veterans in their last years, sitting together with people with shared experience and having a sense of comradeship. This is a really strong aspect of the Legion that we’d love to explore.”

Looking to the future

Showing how the Legion looks forward to the next 25, 50, 100 years

“The Royal British Legion is going to be here for a long time,” says Dan. “So when it comes to telling the story of Legion200, we want to be able to say that we’ll use the experience of Legion100 and the formative years of the organisation to steer our future direction. Please tell us how the Legion has already evolved under your own stewardship, and how it should continue to do so.”

Above: *The Passing of the Unknown Warrior, 11 November 1920* by Frank Owen Salisbury, shown at Tate Britain in 2018



Sudbury Branch: Uncovering 100 years of history

Colin Smith joined the Legion in 1998 after getting involved with the Poppy Appeal locally. “You know when you put your toe in the water and then it’s up round your chin?” he jokes. Since then, he has been Branch Chairman twice and is unofficial branch historian and custodian of the archives.

After Poppy Appeal organiser Stuart Hume stood down last year, he was clearing out his garage and found all the branch minutes and paperwork dating right back to its foundation in 1921. “We were quite astounded when we dug out the box. Stuart had forgotten he even had them,” says Colin.

Since then, Colin has been trawling through the documents, and his own recollections, to put together a comprehensive branch history from 1921 to the present day.

Members past and present are also carefully documented and celebrated on Sudbury’s website, including Len Manning, the branch’s current President, who has an incredible story of being shot down over occupied France in 1944; he was hidden by the owners of a café in Basseville, Seine-et-Marne, until US troops liberated the town. ➤➤



Left: *Daily Mail* article from 2013, recounting Sudbury President Len Manning’s wartime exploits
Above: Len today



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Devon County: Centenary plans well underway

A few years ago, Devon County Membership Support Officer Adrienne Long and her colleagues were clearing out the Legion office in Exeter ahead of its closure. “We came across all the minute books from our county, right back to 1921 when it was first formed,” she says. “I felt it was an incredibly valuable resource.”

She was also given documents from branches that were closing. “The Legion announcing its major celebrations in 2021 got me thinking about what to do with these records, how to showcase them and raise awareness of what the Legion has been in the past and more importantly, what it’s doing today.”

Devon County now plans to put on a touring exhibition of local Legion artefacts throughout much of 2021, harnessing Telling Our Story to help collect items for both the national project and its own local display.

County Chairman Kevin Jeffery explains: “I’ll speak to branches to see if there’s anyone with a story so we can create an audiobook. We’ll ask clubs to talk about what they bring so we can see all the parts of the Legion coming into one. There might also be people who want to share stories of how the Legion helped them and what it meant to them.”

The county is also creating a centenary quilt, with one patch for each of the 181 branches that have ever existed in Devon, and are even planning a torch relay, where a torch of Remembrance will be transported on foot around all the local branches.

“The Legion is very good at Remembrance and remembering others,” Kevin says. “But we need to remember that we have a history too, and we should celebrate it. We’ll tell people about us and hopefully some will ask to be a part of what we do.”



Devon County
knows how to bring
people together:
2018’s Festival of
Remembrance in
Exeter Cathedral

“WHEN I JOINED
THE BRANCH IN
2000, THERE WAS
NO HISTORY
WRITTEN DOWN”

Long Eaton Branch: Determined to discover more

John Irwin, Long Eaton Branch’s Treasurer (and County Treasurer for Derbyshire), has been working on a history of his branch since the early 2000s. He’s now determined to have a version ready to publish in time for the branch’s and the Legion’s 100th birthday in 2021 – but there are still big gaps to fill.

“When I joined the branch in 2000, there was no history at all – no one had written it down,” he says. But the branch did have a living archive: its longest-serving member, Colin Harrison. Not only was he a repository of branch information (he’d joined in 1948), but he had also diligently cut out press clippings about branch activities throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Much of this was given to John when Colin passed away in 2017. In addition, John says that he “really picked Colin’s brains” over the years during their long conversations.

However, that still leaves a big gap prior to the 1950s – the earliest that branch records exist. John has information about the founding of the branch in 1921, about the Armistice Day events of 1922, 1924 and 1926, and about the branch’s first standard in 1934, but little else. “I was on the point of going to the Long Eaton library and seeing what help they could give me, then of course COVID-19 put muckers to that and I’ve been shielding since March,” he says. Undeterred, he’s still working on

his project, reading through old minutes. “I’m determined to have something for next year, even if it’s just a potted history,” he says.

The Long Eaton War Memorial is an important part of the life of the branch. The picture on the left dates from 1966, and the one on the right was taken 50 years later in 2016



PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE INGERS

"OUR VETERANS DESERVE BETTER"

Fees for Commonwealth members of our Armed Forces to stay in the UK are devastatingly high. The Legion is campaigning for change

For most of us, an emergency operation to remove a brain tumour would be stressful enough on its own. But for Taitusi Ratucaucu (pictured below and opposite), being rushed into surgery in April this year was only the start of months of worry and uncertainty. Taitusi, who is originally from Fiji, is an Army veteran who served for a decade, including tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet despite paying taxes in the UK, he was faced with a £27,000 bill from the NHS for his surgery, because he had not applied for leave to remain after his discharge and so was not entitled



to free treatment. As he recuperated from the operation with no means of paying, the outlook was grim.

Taitusi is not the only ex-Serviceman who has faced difficult choices as a result of the UK's leave-to-remain policy for Commonwealth military veterans. They face "exorbitant application fees", says Sir Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and MP for Kingston and Surbiton. Those who have served a minimum of four years have the right to apply to stay. But a veteran with a partner and two children, for example, has to pay nearly £10,000 for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) – and many who can't afford it face deportation.

"The stories of veterans forced to either leave the UK, live here undocumented and unable to work, or take out big loans that trap them in debt are heartbreaking and shaming for our country," says Sir Ed. "Our veterans deserve better."

Many who can't afford the fees have been categorised as illegal

immigrants, facing homelessness, unemployment and left unable to access free NHS care – as Taitusi was.

In 2019, the Legion launched its Stop the Service Charge campaign, calling on the Government to scrap the visa fee for Commonwealth veterans. With the Armed Forces committed to recruiting more from Commonwealth countries, it was clear that high visa fees would affect an increasing number of ex-Service people. Since 2018, the target has been 1,350 new recruits each year – mostly from Africa, the Caribbean and Fiji – up from the previous target of 200 a year.

Currently, around 500 military personnel annually have to find fees of £2,389 per person to stay in the

"A VETERAN WITH A PARTNER AND TWO CHILDREN HAS TO PAY NEARLY £10,000 TO REMAIN"

UK, more than double the £1,051 it cost in 2015. The Home Office maintains that "income from fees plays a vital role in our ability to run a sustainable immigration and nationality system and minimise the burden on the taxpayer."

A cross-party group of MPs led by Conservative Richard Graham and Labour's Madeleine Moon wrote to the Home Secretary in April 2019, calling for the abolition of right-to-remain visa fees for Commonwealth military personnel. For Richard Graham, it's a policy that "needs to be changed". He said: "I was brought up in East Africa and I know, not least



Commonwealth Army veteran Taitusi Ratucaucu (pictured opposite in Afghanistan and here with his children) hit the headlines in May when he was faced with an NHS bill of more than £27,000 for his cancer treatment

"YOU CAN KEEP THE CAMPAIGN AT THE TOP OF YOUR MP'S INBOX BY EMAILING THEM THROUGH THE LEGION'S WEBSITE"

from my Zimbabwean brother-in-law's time in the Army, of the Commonwealth's contribution."

Since then, the campaign has gathered pace: 133 MPs from eight political parties have signed the letter in support of the Legion's campaign, and 2,500 supporters have written to their MPs. But there's still a way to go, says Jo Baker, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager. "With Stop the Service Charge, everyone we talk to, regardless of their party or their background, can see the injustice," she says.

Labour's Shadow Minister for the Armed Forces, Stephen Morgan, who represents a large Royal Navy community in his Portsmouth South constituency, has criticised the Government for its "poor decision-making that is causing so much distress", saying: "Commonwealth troops have a long history of serving this nation with distinction. Charging excessive immigration fees is no way to show gratitude."

Richard Graham and fellow Conservative MP James Sunderland (a former senior Army officer) have each met with the Home Secretary and MOD on the issue, and pledged to write to the Home Secretary again. MPs are continuing to raise it in Parliament. "MPs are putting pressure on their own colleagues, which is really good," says Jo. But it is a constant challenge to get through to decision-makers, with the Government preoccupied with Brexit, the COVID-19 crisis and the current economic slump.

You can keep the campaign at the top of your MP's inbox by emailing



them through the Legion's website (see overleaf for details).

"It motivates MPs to act when they get letters from constituents," says Jo. "If you know that there's a strength of feeling, that's when you can start putting pressure on the Home Office. Governments are receptive to change if you make a good case. Writing really can help."

In addition to lobbying, the Legion helps practically, paying out more than £120,000 in grants for Commonwealth veterans' visa fees since 2018, as well as offering advice.

Stop the Service Charge is one of many campaigns run by the Legion, which range from tackling loneliness to advocating for veterans' financial compensation for injury as a result of Service (turn to page 9 to see our call for evidence on this).

Sometimes campaigns run for years – a recent win was Count Them In, a four-year campaign, which successfully lobbied for

a question identifying veterans in the next census. "It'll give a new, comprehensive data set showing how many people there are in the Armed Forces community and where they live, which will be useful for the provision of health, housing and employment services," says Jo.

Engaging with MPs is a two-way process. The Public Affairs and Public Policy team introduces itself and sets out the case for veterans, but also flags the Legion as an organisation that can help with constituency casework. "Once an MP knows they can refer their constituents to the Legion for financial help or certain kinds of services we provide, we can work together to make sure they get the right support," says Jo.

And if you wonder what happened to Taitusi and his medical bill, a crowdfunding appeal raised £30,000, although the bill is now £50,000 and his fundraising and legal challenge goes on. He has been supported by the Commonwealth Neglected Veterans group, which is also campaigning for changes to the law.

Many other ex-Service people could face situations like Taitusi's in the future. In March, the Home Office committed to "continuing to discuss the impact of immigration fees on members of HM Forces with the Ministry of Defence."

"Commonwealth veterans face a desperate situation," says the Legion's Director General, Charles Byrne. "They have given years of loyal Service and should be able to continue living in the UK without incurring significant financial costs."



"THE SCARIEST THOUGHT WAS MAYBE NEVER BEING ABLE TO SEE MY KIDS AGAIN. I WAS IN A BAD PLACE"

Shawn and Danielle's story

Shawn McPherson and Danielle Deller live in Watford with their daughter, aged two, and Danielle's sons, aged six, eight and ten. Shawn also has a son, eight, from a past relationship. Shawn did three tours in Afghanistan during his ten years in the British Army, after coming to the UK from South Africa.

Shawn: "When I left the Army in 2016, I wasn't told anything about having to apply for a visa. The first I knew was when HR at the toy shop where I worked said to me one day that I didn't have the right visa to be working there. I didn't want to get the shop into trouble, so I said, 'All right, I'll leave.'"

We tried every place we could to get help, but they just referred us on, and we went round in circles. It was devastating. I thought, 'Will they come to my house and say I have to leave the country?' If someone knocked on the door, I was skittish. The scariest thought

was maybe never being able to see my kids again. I stayed home and looked after the kids but the stress combined with PTSD put me in a bad place. A lot fell on Danielle. She was at the end of her tether when she made 'one last call' to someone who referred us to the Legion. They helped with the visa fee and other things too. They were, and still are, amazing."

Danielle: "I was working 70 hours a week as a mental-health support worker to try and raise the money for the visa, and there were days when I didn't see the children and Shawn. It was hard to keep it all together. The worst part was that I couldn't have Shawn's name on anything, including the house. The moment we got his visa, I was able to put everything into our joint names – we don't have to hide any more. It's a big relief, but I don't think there is enough help for people who have served. Families shouldn't have to go through this worry and heartache." »

“MY HUSBAND HAD
DONE TOURS OF IRAQ
AND AFGHANISTAN,
BUT HE COULD
HAVE BEEN SHIPPED
OFF BACK TO
SOUTH AFRICA”

Hannah and Dewald's story

Hannah and Dewald Swart live in Andover with their two children Lilly-Anne, eight, and Edward, five. Hannah works night shifts in a care home and Dewald, who was born in South Africa, has served with the British Army for 13 years.

Hannah: “When my husband joined the British Army, he didn’t plan on falling in love and having a family over here – he was going to do a few years, then move back to South Africa. Visa fees and families seemed far off in the future. We didn’t really think about it during our first few years together until we had the kids, and then it was, ‘Hold up a minute, what happens if you get discharged?’

Dewald has done tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and was deployed on the streets of London after terrorist attacks, but if he didn’t get indefinite leave to remain, he could be shipped off back to South Africa. It felt as though we were in limbo, with the possible break-up of our family hanging over us.

The visa fee kept going up and up, and it puts a lot of stress on you because you’re saving to pay for the visa and then something will go wrong, like the car will break down or the kids need new school uniform. We were constantly having to dip back into the savings and never getting anywhere.

Late one night in April last year, I thought, ‘I’m done with this,’ and I set up an online petition calling for the visa fees to be waived. Dewald joked that I wouldn’t get more than 10,000 signatures and my mum reckoned I’d get 25,000, but the response was crazy. By the beginning of June, 150,000 people had

signed the petition. The support was amazing. The Legion called and said ‘Someone who’s seen your petition has volunteered to cover the visa fee – are you interested?’ It was a total shock. Once it was done, we went out for a meal to celebrate, and we sent photos of the ceremony to the person who paid for it. We’re planning to meet up with them in the future.

Citizenship costs another £1,330. Dewald had to pass a Life in the UK Test (I couldn’t even answer the questions!), an English test and, although we’ve been married for 11 years and we have two children together, we still got questioned on whether we were legit.

I’ve had a few other Commonwealth military personnel tell me their stories, and I’ve passed them on to the Legion. But often they don’t want to go public because they’re worried it will affect their career.

Even though our situation’s resolved, I’m going to stand up and fight for this. The Legion is doing the politics behind the scenes and we work well together. I’m going to keep emailing and writing to MPs and the Prime Minister until they hear us out.”



HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP

If you’d like to help Stop the Service Charge, visit www.rbl.org.uk/stopheservicecharge where you can find more details about the campaign and a link for emailing your MP.

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WILLIAM J DAVIES
2ND BATTALION ROYAL WELCH
FUSILIERS, MALAYA

1954-1956

"SOMETIMES, WE
WOULD PATROL
SWAMPS IN SEARCH
OF INSURGENTS
– THE WATER WAS
FULL OF LEECHES"



“

I was born in Awelfryn, a house my father built outside Llanboidy in Camarthenshire after his Service with the Royal Marines during the First World War.

We were four children: three brothers and a sister and our first language was Welsh.

I did a five-year apprenticeship in my father's building business, but just before the end of it, the Ministry of Labour and National Service summoned me to a medical in Swansea, then ordered me to report to barracks in Cardiff to join the Welch Regiment on 4 January 1954. There, we had kit thrown at us and were told to learn our number (mine was 22989984). We were known by our surnames: I was Davies84.

After basic training, a group of us transferred to the 2nd Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers and in July 1954, at the age of nearly 21, I boarded the troopship *Empire Fowey* in Southampton, Korea-bound – or so I thought.

En route, a peace treaty was signed, which precluded fresh troops from landing in Korea, so the *Empire Fowey* docked in Singapore and 2/RWF prepared for anti-terrorist duties in Malaya, where we would confront the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), the armed wing of the Communist Party.

The MNLA, led by Chin Peng, had supported the British Army during the Second World War occupation by the Japanese, and the British had supplied him with arms and food. After the Japanese were driven out of Malaya, the MNLA decided: 'Now we've beaten the Japanese, we can beat the British,' and in 1948, Chin Peng went to war. The British declared a state of emergency and began counter-insurgency military action, aimed at cutting off the Communist Terrorists (CTs) from their civilian supporters and food. In turn, the CTs terrorised rural areas, attacking villagers and troops.

I started out in 7 Platoon C Company as a Bren Gunner; then, after a signalling course at HQ at Port Dickson in Negeri Sembilan, I joined 9 Platoon as a Signaller. Most of my time then was spent in the jungle, on operations. We would go out for two to seven weeks, return to camp for a day or so, then go straight back.

Typically, we would leave camp at around 02.00hrs, having prepared everything before going to bed. I would collect five days' rations, check the radio and gather all necessary codes, and get equipment, personal kit and ammunition together, which usually weighed about 65-70lbs. We needed 20 pints of water

daily and took water-purifying tablets for when we had only dirty water to drink, but staying hydrated was virtually impossible. I remember dreaming about a dripping tap we had in the garden back home.

We were never told where we were going, but always arrived just before dawn. We would move quickly into the jungle with no one saying a word, unless they were close enough to whisper. Sometimes, we would patrol swamps in search of insurgents – the water was full of leeches, which would attach themselves to our legs. Or we would be looking for a CT camp where propaganda leaflets were being printed. One operation involved laying ambushes on a path through a rubber plantation – we slept in thorny scrub for three nights, living on beans and 'dog biscuits', with rubber tappers passing within feet of us each morning.

The jungle is full of waterways, and crossing rivers was difficult – you had to lean against the pressure of water or you'd topple over and be dragged downriver. Feeling the sand shift beneath my feet, with the water over my chin, I always hoped that I'd reached the deepest part. Three days before the end of one operation, I did fall in and the radio got soaked. The battalion had a newspaper, *The Royal Welchman*, and in the following months, there was an article about the drowning of 9 Platoon Signaller. I did not send that issue home.

In the jungle, we relied on our Sarawak trackers. They could tell how old a footprint was, when leaves had been disturbed,



Outside the signals tent at camp



whether plants were poisonous or if a snake was dangerous. They were tattooed, with long hair, and they travelled with a rifle and a parang (machete). In their cases, they carried the shrunken skulls of their forefathers.

Operations could be brutal – if CTs were shot, they were brought back alive so they could be interrogated, but if they were dead, their bodies – or just their heads and hands – were carried back to camp to be checked against photos of known terrorists. On one occasion, a badly wounded CT ran off into the jungle and his body was found buried in a small hole in three pieces – he’d been dismembered by his own people.

Civilians were under pressure to help the CTs, and there were reprisals against those who co-operated with the colonial authorities. Once, we went into deep jungle in search of a village that CTs were using as a source of food. We suddenly saw a man in front of us, crouching with a blowpipe in his mouth. Thankfully, he recognised us before we had to defend ourselves. The villagers were taken to a new settlement, and we poisoned the tapioca so the MNLA could no longer use it. The Malay Home Guard then moved in to replace the platoon. In this way, the MNLA was gradually driven out of its territory.

By 1955, CTs were being offered money to come out of the jungle and rejoin their

From top: William was a Bren Gunner before he became a Signaller; at the main camp in Kuala Klawang

“A DAY OUT OF PORT, WE HEARD 9 PLATOON WAS AMBUSHED”

families, and many did. By contrast, the CTs ‘took no prisoners’, as the saying goes, and bodies were recovered showing signs of torture, with teeth and eyes missing. Even in a ‘White Area’ – a supposedly bandit-free zone – the battalion was a target. On 13 October 1955, Capt JMB Davies, who’d taken us on our Signals Cadre in HQ Port Dickson, was shot dead when his jeep was stopped by a fallen tree that CTs had dragged across the road. The guard and the pay clerk who were with him were also killed.

As it got close to my demob date, it was hard watching 9 Platoon prepare to move out on an operation, knowing I would not go with them. On my last night in camp, the Major joined us for a drink and, to my surprise, proposed a toast to Davies84. I felt sure later that he expected me to reply, but my celebrating had taken me over by then.

In Singapore, I joined the troopship *Empire Orwell*, which was pointing homewards. A day out of port, we heard that 9 Platoon had been ambushed by 20 CTs, and Cpl Rowlands had been shot in the stomach. The following day, he died of his wounds. I felt shocked as I’d been part of this platoon for most of my national service in Malaya.

After three weeks at sea, I arrived home on Christmas Eve 1955. It was hard settling in. I became a chapel-goer, which helped, but the nightmares continued for decades.

I married and had a family, and after hearing about my experiences, the children suggested that I write some of them down. Not a day passes without recalling some of the memories that have been buried deep. It was always ambushes that my nightmares involved. But writing it down has helped, and there are no ambushes any more.

I must say, it was much more difficult to leave the Army than it was to join. Whether in or out of the jungle, we lived as a family and defended each other always. We parted as true comrades, proud to have helped the people of Malaya and thankful that they now live peacefully in their country of Malaysia.”

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You can renew your membership, pay online, change your details and sign up to the membership e-newsletter by visiting the Legion's Self-Service Portal – a secure area of our website created just for members.

Please visit selfservice.britishlegion.org.uk to log in. If you don't yet have an account, you can register quickly and easily by following this step-by-step guide:

1. Visit the registration page:
selfservice.britishlegion.org.uk/register
2. Enter your membership number, the email address linked to your membership* and date of birth, then create a new password and click the register button.
3. Your new account will be created and you will be taken to a page where you can enter your details to log in.

*If you haven't already provided us with an email address and your date of birth, please call the Membership Helpline and we'll update our records with your information.

GIFT AID

UK taxpayers can enable Gift Aid, which means that for every £1 of your membership fee, 25p will be donated to the Legion. Visit the Self-Service Portal or call our Helpline (below) to set this up.

The pandemic has presented us with unprecedented challenges and we want to assure you that your safety is our priority. This is why we're encouraging everyone to renew online or by phone, avoiding payment methods such as cash or cheque that bring you into close contact with others. Also, delays caused by COVID-19 mean it might take up to four weeks to process cash and cheque payments, which will delay the arrival of your membership card. Here are the safe ways to pay:

RENEW BY DIRECT DEBIT

It's automated, so once your Direct Debit has been set up, you don't need to do it again. Paying by Direct Debit is the quickest way for you to receive your membership card and it only costs the Legion one per cent of your membership fee to process, saving the charity money that can be used to improve your membership experience. We are discontinuing Continuous Payment Authority (CPA) as a payment method in order to simplify the payment process. Direct Debit is the closest replacement for CPA.

RENEW BY CARD

Like Direct Debit, this is one of the quickest ways for you to get your membership card. It only costs the Legion four per cent of your membership fee to process, which saves the charity money.

To set up your Direct Debit or to pay by card, please visit our Self-Service Portal selfservice.britishlegion.org.uk or call our Membership Helpline (below). Visit www.rbl.org.uk/renewmembership for a full list of all payment methods.

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• Calling from the Republic of Ireland: 1800 911 936 • Calling from overseas: +44 (0)20 7191 1091 (full rate)

REUNIONS

Check our listings to find out if old friends are meeting up again soon

CORONAVIRUS

As there are restrictions on gatherings due to COVID-19, events are subject to cancellation. Please check with the event organiser and visit www.gov.uk for updates.

NAVY

846 Sqdn RNAS (1962-64)

11-13 September, Tiverton Hotel, Tiverton
Reunion dinner on 12 September.
Contact the Secretary Barry (Baz) Marshall on 01288 381002 or at percymar@littlebridge.eclipse.co.uk

Royal Naval Communication Chiefs' Association (RNCCA)

18-20 September, Hallmark Hotel Chester The Queen, Chester
51st reunion weekend and AGM. Friday: evening meal and disco. Saturday: visit to Liverpool; 18.30 reception and gala dinner. Sunday: 09.30 AGM.
Book through Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116. For details, email honsec@rncca.org.uk or Brian Taylor at btaylor18@ntlworld.com

HMS Ocean Association

18-21 September, Aztec Hotel, Bristol
All R68 and L12 crew and partners welcome. Stays of one to three nights available, including food

and entertainment. Book through Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116 or contact Jo Harlow at joharlow76@gmail.com

Anti Submarine Warfare Association (ASWA) (TASI) (ASWI)

26 September, Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea
65th annual dinner and dance, £45. All ASW, UW and TAS welcome. Visit www.aswassociation.org.uk or contact Mr Bob Burton at webmaster@aswassociation.org.uk

HMS Dido

2-4 October, Hallmark Hotel Derby Mickleover Court, Derby
All-commissions reunion, £160pp. Friday: evening buffet. Saturday: National Memorial Arboretum visit, AGM and gala dinner. Contact Colin Bates on 0121 742 8188 or at secretary@hms-dido.com

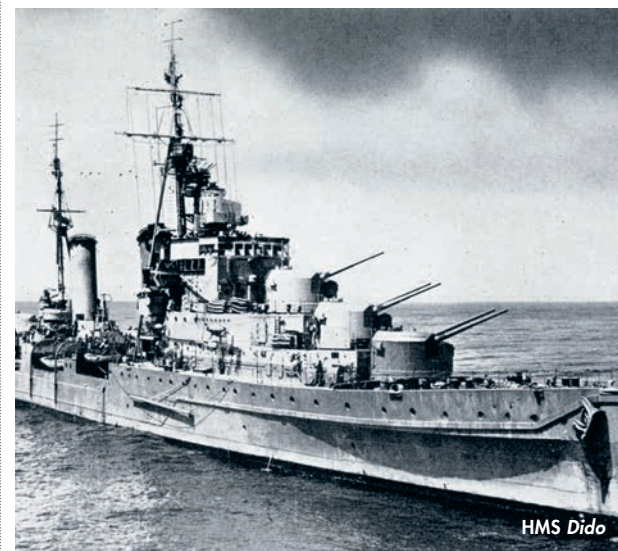
HMS Phoebe Association

2-5 October, Aztec Hotel, Bristol
Reunion for all those who served on HMS Phoebe (includes C43, Dido-class AA Cruiser,

WWII service and F42, Leander class frigate). Book through Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116. For details, contact S/M Dave Newson on 01636 673970 or 07746 619856 or at hmsphoebeassociation@outlook.com

HMS Lowestoft Association

2-5 October, Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea
10th reunion including gala dinner. All who served in Lowestoft during her RN service (1961-1986) are welcome (including wives/partners/guests). Why not come along and meet some old oppos, make some new friends and have a 'swinging the lamp' session? We guarantee a weekend to remember! A one-, two-, or three-night package is available or,



if you reside locally, why not join us for dinner on Saturday night? Book through Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116 or contact ian@hmslowestoft.co.uk

Royal Navy Weapon Mechanics Association

10 October, Bear Hotel, Havant
The final reunion of the Weapon Mechs Association. Wives and partners welcome. Contact Secretary Peter Andrews at weaponmechs50@btinternet.com

HMS Ariadne

5-7 March 2021, Best Western Ipswich, IP8 3JD
10th reunion – all shipmates welcome,



along with wives, partners and guests. Book through Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116. For details, contact Dave Sprinks on 07989 435701 or at dave-sprinks@hotmail.com

HMS Ganges Association

23-26 April 2021, Warner Gunton Hall Coastal Village, near Lowestoft
Annual reunion open to all those who served at HMS Ganges, as well as wives and partners. For booking details, please contact Tony Willders on 07787 106202 or at tony.willders@btinternet.com

HMS Ships Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association

7-9 May 2021, Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea
2021 AGM and gala dinner. For further details, contact Denis Askham at askhamd3@gmail.com

HMS Saintes, HMS Cadiz, HMS Wizard (combined)

7-10 May 2021, Novotel Nottingham Derby Hotel, Long Eaton, Nottingham
A combined reunion (each has its own AGM). All members from each ship are welcome, as are friends, families, wives and partners – the more, the merrier! For more details, contact Isle of Wight Tours on 01983 405116 or at enquiries@iowtours.com

ARMY

38 Sqn, Royal Corps of Transport

26 September, Ex Servicemen's Club, St. Neots, PE19 8GW
13th annual reunion. All who served with 38 Sqn RCT and families welcome. Email rct38sqn@hotmail.com

The Army Dog Unit NI (RAVC) Association
26-27 September, Holiday Inn Express, Burton on Trent

Saturday: AGM at the Holiday Inn Express, then afterwards at the Legion Alrewas club (no dress code). Sunday: Annual memorial service at the Millennium Shelter at the Ulster Ash Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum, then again afterwards at the Legion Alrewas club. Contact John Tucker on 07734 113077 or at johnatucker70@yahoo.com

1 Parachute Logistic Regiment

9-11 October, Bedworth, near Coventry
Annual reunion. Contact Pete Stead on 07976 278919 or at stead3@icloud.com

Royal Army Pay Corps Regimental Association Gloucester Branch

10 October, Dumbleton Hall Hotel, Evesham
Reunion 12pm. Contact Derek Evans at derekevans@sky.com

Singapore Dawnwatchers' Society (SDWS)

12-14 October, Hard Days Night Hotel, Liverpool
Reunion for those who served in, or were attached to, the Intelligence Corps in Singapore, Borneo or Malay Peninsula in the 60s or 70s. Contact Dave Wakelam at davidwakelam396@gmail.com

The Royal Artillery Boys and Junior Leaders' Association

17-18 October, Holiday Inn Birmingham – Bromsgrove
30th reunion. Contact Ted McKenzie on 07900 806235 or at exboysra.fm@gmail.com

Herforder Association

30 October-2 November
Auckland Hotel, Morecambe
Reunion for all who served in Herford in Germany, including civilians attached. Contact Harry Courtney at hazbren2430@gmail.com

RAF

RAF Locking 119/219/404 Apprentice Entries

23-24 October, Winter Gardens, Weston-super-Mare BS23 1AJ
50th anniversary reunion. Friday: informal evening. Saturday: formal dinner. Open to all RAF Locking 119/219/404 entry apprentices, plus partners. Contact Barry Cox at barrycox124@hotmail.com

RAF Boys Entrants 42nd Entry Telegs Association

27-29 April 2021, Telford Hotel & Golf Resort, Telford, Shropshire
Annual reunion. Contact John Lewis (Chairman) at jaslmlewis@aol.com

PLANNING A REUNION?

Please note that while The Royal British Legion's head office remains closed, we can only accept reunion information via email. Send details, especially the date, time and location, with 'Reunions' in the subject line, to: membersmag@britishlegion.org.uk

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» Mystery chef

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Contact: Mike Lane at mikelane@live.co.uk



» Mining for intel

Jean Clarke's late father Haydn James Pugh (circled) was born in Bargoed, South Wales, on 17 August 1920 and held as a POW by the Japanese in the Second World War. "After the war, Dad worked in the coal mines, but he never spoke of his Army Service and died on 17 August 1994," she says. "We'd love some information to pass on to his great-grandchildren - he would have been 100 this year."

Contact: Jean Clarke at pegal80@hotmail.com



» Brothers in arms?

Judith Foster's father came across these photographs, at first thinking one might be Albert Victor Unwin, her great-uncle Albert, of The King's (Liverpool Regiment), who was killed in action in northern France on 16 April 1918. She now believes they could be his brothers Reginald Thomas, Richard Ernest or Robert Bertram, or an Unwin/Foster relation, and is keen to hear from anyone who recognises them. All she knows is that the man on the far right was in the Royal Army Medical Corps. "I'd love to find out who they are," she says.

Contact: Judith Foster at judithfoster1@outlook.com

LOST AND FOUND

Looking for someone? All we need is a photo, brief description and your contact details. Please note that while The Royal British Legion's head office remains closed, we can only accept submissions via email, at membersmag@britishlegion.org.uk

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LETTERS

A tribute to Dame Vera, a mystery solved and setting the record straight



5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. While home Service did not count, UK-based members of the RAF who were actively engaged in the air against the enemy did qualify, as did those who flew new planes to France.

The obverse shows the winged figure of Victory, similar to the statue surmounting the Queen Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace. The reverse has the words 'The Great War for Civilisation 1914-1919' in four lines, surrounded by a laurel wreath.

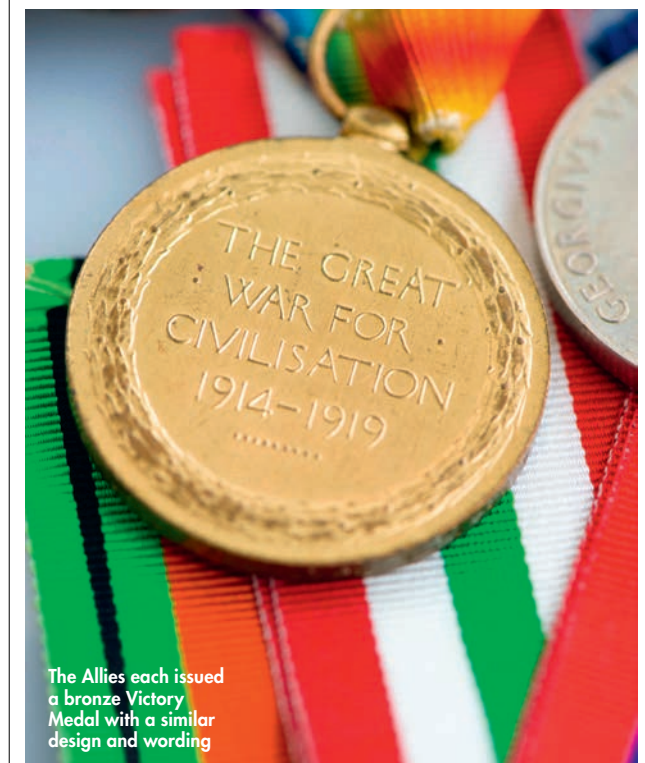
The recipient's name, rank, Service number and unit were impressed on the edge of the medal. My dad, who was in the

Army, thinks that the initials 'A&SH' on your medal stands for Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Hope this helps your investigation.
C Hellen, by email

I've just opened my copy of *Legion* magazine and seen Maurice Brown's plea for info. This one I can solve. The medal is the Allied Victory Medal (commonly known as 'Wilfred').

The number is the recipient's Service number, followed by his rank when awarded, then his name and his unit. Hence 7504 Private Downs of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Catherine Hanson, by email >>



The Allies each issued a bronze Victory Medal with a similar design and wording

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A DAME

I am a retired Sergeant from the Brockville Rifles Infantry Regiment in Canada, a Canadian Legion member, and a singer, actor and entertainer. I'm writing because, like millions of other Canadians, I was so very sad to hear about the passing of Dame Vera Lynn.

A number of years ago, I started writing and producing musicals honouring our Second World War veterans, and in 2012, I wrote to Dame Vera and told her that she was the person who inspired me to do so. I was so surprised and thrilled when I received a reply from Ms Lynn and, to this day, I have that letter proudly on display in my studio. I donated the profit from my shows *Bless 'Em All* (2011) and *Silver Wings* (2017) to The Royal Canadian Legion Poppy Fund

and to the restoration and enhancement of a war memorial that honours the Canadian and Allied airmen who fought for the cause of freedom. I perform many shows in all musical genres, but whatever the theme, I include a Vera Lynn song. I will always remember this remarkable lady.

AJ Benoit, by email

MEDAL MYSTERY SOLVED

I'm 14 years old and I have been looking into the history of the medal Maurice Brown sent to Lost Trails (June issue). I have found out that it is the Victory Medal. Wikipedia states that to qualify, recipients need to have served in the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom or the British Empire, or with certain recognised voluntary organisations, and have entered any theatre of war between

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KAR veterans from Kenya with members of the KAR Association at Sandhurst in November 2015

ASKARI VALUED IN SECOND WORLD WAR

It was with great sadness that I read the letter The Kikuyu Warrior by David M Swindlehurst (June issue). I am afraid that what Mr Swindlehurst was told by Muriama does not seem accurate, but we old soldiers have been known to embellish our Service from time to time.

I served with the KAR in the 1950s and do not doubt that Muriama was in Burma, but how a regular infantry soldier who had risen to the important rank of Company Sergeant Major could also be an excellent mechanic, I find hard to believe. I must point out that 11th Battalion, KAR was not at Imphal – he could have been wounded elsewhere, many were, and a large number never came home.

When tens of thousands of askari were discharged after the Second World War, they received warrants to return home, the majority to rural areas, reporting to their local

District Commissioner en route. This system fell down for the small minority from an urban background, like Muriama. But I think it is highly unlikely that they were “dumped on the quay, unwanted and with nothing”. Surely, their British officers, WOs and Senior NCOs would not have let that happen when you consider what they had gone through together?

To say no medals were awarded is wrong, but they had to apply for them, as did everyone else who left the Armed Forces. As for “no pension, no pay, no job, no recognition, nothing”, this also applied to the majority of Service personnel after the Second World War.

If there is something we should concern ourselves with now, it is ex-askari who, to this day, must rely on charity. This is provided by organisations set up with Legion assistance and helped by The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, both of which the King’s African Rifles and East African Forces Association work closely

with. They raised the Askari Appeal, which is still looking for any aid it can get.
Major John H Jessop, by email

As a former officer in the King’s African Rifles, I was concerned to read the letter by David M Swindlehurst, titled The Kikuyu Warrior, in the June edition of your magazine.

There were great challenges in repatriating and resettling more than 50,000 askari from East and Central Africa who had fought in Burma, but the allegation that they were “dumped on the quay, unwanted and with nothing” is offensive. The colonial administrations made extensive plans for their reception, including some compensation, and the military chain of command awarded and distributed medals worn to this day with pride by veterans.

At a time when passions are easily aroused over racial matters, such allegations must not go unchallenged. They offend the honour of all of us who were privileged to command African soldiers and took pride in their care. The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, with whom we work closely, every year raises and distributes money for the welfare of veterans and their widows who are in need, via a trusted network throughout the nations of our askari.

Brigadier David Williams, President, King’s African Rifles and East African Forces Association, by email



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TONY HUNT
EX ROYAL MILITARY POLICE



Following the death of his wife Rowena, Tony found himself alone a lot of the time.

“When you are a couple, you socialise with other couples, but that wanes when you lose your partner.”

Tony found ways to keep himself busy in the day time, but the evenings were long and hard.

“Once that door closes, it's not quite the same. There's no one to say 'do you want a cup of tea?' at the end of the day, so you don't bother. The joy of doing everyday tasks such as cooking and keeping the house in order had been sucked out of me in the absence of someone to share them with.”

Tony joined the Royal Hospital Chelsea as a Chelsea Pensioner in January 2017. As soon as he arrived for his four day stay, he knew he was at home. Tony had long dreamt of becoming a Chelsea Pensioner and will always remember the pride he felt on the day he walked through the gates as a full time Chelsea Pensioner.

Since becoming a Chelsea Pensioner, Tony has a renewed vigour for life and is an active member of the Royal Hospital community. Tony has instigated a tea morning on his Long Ward and three mornings a week now, Tony and a few of his fellow Chelsea Pensioners sit down for a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat. He is always volunteering to accompany other pensioners to hospital

visits and enjoys going out and representing the Hospital in his Scarlets, especially during the Remembrance period, collecting money for the Poppy Appeal.

“There's nothing like the camaraderie and friendship here - we help each other and have a bit of banter along the way. The staff are so friendly, they're doing a fantastic job and have made the Royal Hospital a home that I hope to be in for a long while.”

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