

ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

May 2021



THE CENTENARY EDITION



ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

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On the cover

To mark 100 years of the Royal British Legion, we've gathered pictures of members, volunteers, staff and the Armed Forces community, to form a snapshot of the many people who make the RBL what it is today.

ILLUSTRATION: SAM KERR PHOTOGRAPHY: PA IMAGES

Find us on Facebook @OfficialPoppyLegion

NEWS

A round-up of the latest RBL stories making headlines



HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh among a sea of Standards in 1977

PHOTOGRAPHY ALAMY, COURTESY OF THE HEATHER ANNE JOHNSON COLLECTION

IN TRIBUTE TO HRH THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH

The Royal British Legion was profoundly saddened to learn of the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on 9th April. His years of faithful service will be long remembered.

Prince Philip was married to HM The Queen, patron of the Royal British Legion, for 73 years. Born in Corfu, he attended schools in Paris, England,

Germany and Scotland before entering the Royal Navy at the age of 17. He became one of the Navy's youngest First Lieutenants, and was second-in-command of HMS *Wallace* during the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943.

After the war, he became engaged to the young Princess Elizabeth, and the couple married in November 1947.

He was an industrious patron who was involved with more than 800 organisations. His most significant commitment was in founding the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, which has had more than four million participants.

"We mourn his passing deeply," says Una Cleminson, National Chairman. "He was always generous with his time."



Madame Guérin, an early pioneer of the poppy in Britain

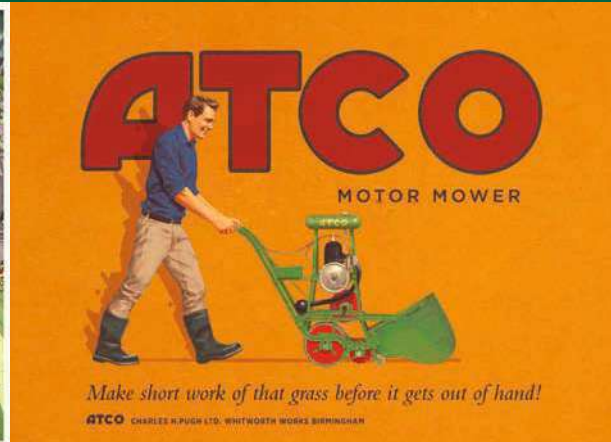
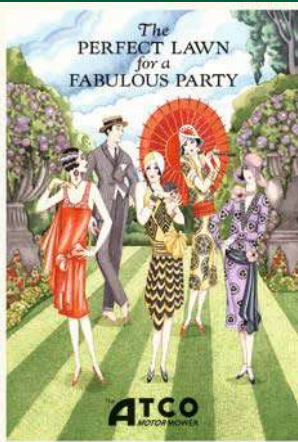
Our first 100 years

"On a bright sunny day in early September 1921, a sprightly 43-year-old French woman presented herself at the door of 26 Eccleston Square, the Legion's headquarters in Pimlico, London. She had an appointment to meet the General Secretary, Colonel Edward Heath, and the subject of the meeting was the poppy. She had been promoting the poppy as a symbol of Remembrance in the United States since the end of the First World War, and it was her desire to spread the idea across the seas to Britain and the Empire. Her role in the story of the poppy is not well known. She was barely mentioned in the British press at the time and in subsequent history books she gets a line or two at most. Yet she is probably the single most important person in the story of the Remembrance Day poppy. Her name is Anna Guérin."

You can read more about the birth of the Poppy Appeal, how Earl Haig established the first Remembrance Day on 11th November, 1921, and the part played by Madame Guérin, along with other unsung heroes of the RBL, in *We Are The Legion* by Julie Summers. Richly illustrated with more than 350 images, including an extraordinary collection of early poppy designs, Legion posters and unseen archive shots, the book also includes original photography specially commissioned for the project.

Available at Amazon, Waterstones or your favourite bookseller.





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PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



LGBT VETERANS TO HAVE MEDALS RESTORED

The Ministry of Defence has introduced a new policy that will allow ex-service personnel who were dismissed from the Armed Forces on the basis of their sexuality to have their medals restored. Previously, men and women who were found guilty of contravening the ban on LGBT service personnel faced disciplinary action and dismissal, leading to the loss of their medals.

In 2000, the ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual people serving in the military was lifted, and since 2014, transgender people have been officially allowed to serve. In 2019, the Royal British Legion launched its first LGBTQ+ & Allies Branch. Chairman Nick Purkis says: "This is a significant ruling for our members. Some served and fought for their country, but had their medals removed, only for the offence of being LGBT. Having their medal entitlement restored is a significant step to finally recognising their service."

A number of LGBTQ+ & Allies Branch members were instrumental in persuading the Government to change its mind, in particular Craig Jones and Caroline Paige, CEOs of the charity Fighting with Pride.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer, who spearheaded the change, says: "LGBT personnel have and continue to make significant contributions to the Armed Forces. This announcement addresses a historic injustice and demonstrates that the military is a positive place to work for all who choose to serve."

Nick is now urging the Government to issue pardons to those previously convicted under the anti-LGBT legislation and to restore pensions and other entitlements that were also lost.

The gold standard

A member of Deddington Branch for 65 years, Norman West was recently and deservedly awarded an RBL Gold Badge by the National Chairman, as well as being nominated by Oxfordshire County in the category of 'Excellence' for an RBL Centenary Award.

Norman did his National Service during the Korean War and is pictured below, left, in 1953 behind the lines of the 3rd Battle of the Hook. He became a member in 1956 and has been recognised for his constant and exceptional contribution to the RBL. He has served as Treasurer (for the branch and club from 1975 to 2001, and for the branch until 2018), Standard Bearer and Branch President (2001-2008), and

was also a PAO for many years. He has raised thousands of pounds for the charity every year.

Commander Rob Forsyth RN (Ret'd), Chairman, praised Norman for his "unswerving support to me through a stressful time, [which] helped save the branch from closure. His innate modesty hides a very dedicated and loyal member, and this recognition of his many years of unstinting support to the RBL I wholeheartedly applaud."

Norman himself is "enormously proud that I should have been singled out for these honours and would like to say a very big thank you to the President, Chairman and committee for all their support."



Update on membership fees

Please note that the membership fee increase originally planned for January 2021 was postponed until 1st April, 2021. The fee is now £18, as per members' vote at the Annual Conference 2020.

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Adrienne
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Poppy Appeal 2020: £24 million raised so far

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the RBL's 2020 Poppy Appeal has managed to raise an impressive £24 million so far. Claire Rowcliffe, Director of Fundraising, explains: "Our need to keep the public, volunteers, members and staff safe saw us having to rethink our initial plans, but we were able to come up with alternatives to ensure the Appeal could still go ahead."

New ways for the public to donate were developed, such as Poppies in the Post; Text to Donate; Fundraising Packs; and the virtual My Poppy Run, which on its own raised more than £1 million. It was also a chance to increase online donations and Poppy Shop purchases, both of which were in high demand. And we gained nearly 500,000 new supporters through our 'Every Poppy Counts' campaign.

Claire is proud of what's been achieved. "Given the full-lockdown restrictions in many areas over the second week of the Appeal, the sum of £24 million is quite remarkable, and it was only possible with the effort and creative thinking of everyone across our amazing RBL family and the public."

We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part and supported the Poppy Appeal.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHARLIE CLIFT



"Given the full-lockdown restrictions, the sum of £24 million is remarkable"

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021 OPEN TO ALL

Sadly, we can't get together in person for our landmark Centennial Conference on 15th May, but the event will be held virtually, so attendees from all over the world will be able to join the livestream from their own homes. National Chairman Una Cleminson and Director General Charles Byrne will address members. There will also be a presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts, with the opportunity to ask questions through the Membership Forum.

Participants were impressed by the digital format of our first virtual Annual Conference, last year: "Sincere congratulations for organising this event so well. It was simplicity itself to navigate and everything seemed to work well!" said Dorothy Allett, Jackfield Branch.

Register at: britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/things-to-do/membership/our-members/annual-conference



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Italian wheelchair fencer Bebe Vio is one of the Paralympians featured in the Netflix film *Rising Phoenix*

“Paralympians don’t deal in what’s not possible, they only deal in what is possible”

A glimpse into Paralympic history

The long association between sport for athletes with impairments and the community of ex-servicemen and women has been spotlighted in a new Netflix documentary, *Rising Phoenix*. During the Second World War, Dr Ludwig Guttmann opened the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Buckinghamshire, to help injured Armed Forces personnel. Dr Guttmann was a firm believer in sport as therapy, and he organised the first competition for veterans in wheelchairs in 1948, which would become the annual Stoke Mandeville Games.

In 1952, the competition widened, with Dutch veterans also taking part. These games, often described as the precursor of the modern Paralympic Games, were the first international events for disabled athletes. Dr Guttmann’s idea for the Paralympics was “liberating and incredibly visionary”, says Greg Nugent, one of the film’s producers, in an interview for the St. James’s Place podcast *Tomorrow Comes Today*. “He managed to change the world when it came to thinking about this.”

Many Paralympians have also competed at the Invictus Games, and the RBL supports the families, friends and carers of the UK team. One such competitor is David Henson, who was serving with the Army in Afghanistan in 2011 when he lost his legs after standing on an IED. He captained the British team at Invictus 2012, and went on to win bronze at the Rio Paralympics in 2016.

“Philip Craven, who was the President of the Paralympic movement for a long time, has a great line,” says Barnaby Spurrier, producer of *Rising Phoenix*. “Paralympians don’t deal in what’s not possible, they only deal in what is possible.”



PHOTOGRAPHY: NETFLIX, GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY

Veterans counted in census for the first time

Following the success of the RBL’s Count Them In campaign, a question on whether people have served in the Armed Forces was included in the decennial census in England and Wales for the first time. It supports commitments made by the Government under the Armed Forces Covenant. “This will significantly improve understanding of the Armed Forces community,” explains Matthew Seward, Assistant Director of Public Affairs and Public Policy. “Estimates have suggested as many as one in 10 people in the UK are members of that community, but there is currently very little definitive information on where they are or their needs. This will have an impact well into the future, as it will ensure that we, along with other charities and service providers, can deliver the best service possible to them when and where it is needed most.”

IN MEMORY OF CAPTAIN SIR TOM MOORE



ahead of his 100th birthday, he set out to raise £1,000 for the NHS by walking 100 laps of his family garden.

His campaign became world famous, and his fundraising totalled £38.9 million. In July 2020, he was knighted by HM The Queen in an open-air ceremony at Windsor Castle.

He also established The Captain Tom Foundation with his daughter Hannah Ingram-Moore. The RBL is one of its partner charities, with the Foundation supporting the Legion’s Battle Back Centre and helping the Armed Forces community.

“The Legion does a marvellous job for ex-servicemen and people who are in need,” he said in an interview for *Legion* last year. For people the world over who were inspired by his positivity, the memory of his service will live on.

In his 100th year, Captain Sir Tom Moore became a global symbol of fortitude and spirit. Captain Sir Tom, who passed away on 2nd February, 2021, was born and raised in Keighley, West Yorkshire. He was called up in April 1940 and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army. He trained dispatch riders to ride motorcycles, as it was the quickest way of navigating the difficult terrain in India and Burma.

Captain Sir Tom was demobbed after VJ Day and returned to civilian life in Yorkshire. In April 2020,

BECOME A CHELSEA PENSIONER

“BEING AT THE ROYAL HOSPITAL HAS FILLED A VOID FOR ME. WHEN YOU COME HERE, YOU FIND FRIENDSHIP – THERE’S ALWAYS SOMEONE TO GO OUT WITH OR SOMEONE WHO MIGHT NEED SOME HELP OR SOME COMPANY.”

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.”

The Royal Hospital Chelsea provides sheltered, independent living for people like Tony, in some of the most beautiful and historic buildings in the UK.

To apply to become a Chelsea Pensioner you must be a retired soldier, in receipt of a state pension with no dependent spouse or children and able to live independently on our long wards. As a resident of the Royal Hospital you will be an ambassador for your home and the wider veteran community.

HOW TO APPLY

Contact the Chelsea Pensioner Admissions Officer

Call: 020 7881 5204

Email: admissions@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk

MARKING LEGION 100 TOGETHER

This year, we’re asking our members, volunteers and supporters to unite communities across the UK and around the world in celebration of our 100 years of supporting the Armed Forces community.

Anyone can get involved: all types of activities are welcome, small and large, online and offline, with immediate family or a wider group of friends and members of the public. After a challenging year of isolation, it’s the ideal opportunity to come together with your community.

If you have already started planning activities, please remember to register them on the RBL website, where you can also download the Celebrating Together brochure, which features ideas and inspiration on how to mark the centenary face to face or virtually.

For more information, please contact your Membership Support Officer or Community Fundraiser.

RUNNING THE STANDARD

One innovative celebration is a motorcycle ride being organised by Royal British Legion Riders Branch members Matthew Merry and his mum Sue. Running the Standard will take place in July 2021 and will cover almost 3,000 miles. A miniature Riders Branch Standard will travel to every county in Great Britain. “Since its conception, the ride has taken on a life of its own,” says Matt. The branch is also fundraising. Find out how to get involved at runningthestandard.uk

“We hope that Riders Branch members across the country will join us for part or all of our celebrations, as well as the wider RBL community”



Matt Merry of the RBL Riders Branch is organising a centenary ride

Centenary activities

As part of the Royal British Legion's centenary celebrations, we are dedicated to marking the past 100 years of making a difference in the Armed Forces community and looking towards the next 100 years. The RBL is committed to ensuring all those who have served and sacrificed on our behalf receive the fair treatment and recognition they deserve.

In 2021, the RBL has several projects that are focused on celebration and commemoration. You can read about Telling Our Story, the showcase for memories of the RBL, on page 38, and visit the project online. The book *We Are The Legion*, excerpted on page 7, tells the story of the organisation from its founding in 1921.

Later this year, the Reward and Recognition Scheme will honour the incredible achievements and efforts of members, staff, volunteers and partners past and present. In the spirit of 'One Legion', the shared values and beliefs of our people underpin the essence of the RBL.

“The spirit of ‘One Legion’ is our shared values and beliefs”

Knit it to win it

Many branches, members and communities have a great history of knitting and crocheting poppies to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal and create Remembrance displays. It was a fitting partnership when the RBL teamed up with online knitting and crochet retailer Deramores last year for a range of poppy-themed crafting kits and digital patterns. Deramores donates a portion of every sale to the RBL in support of the Armed Forces community. Now, in celebration of Legion 100, Deramores is launching a competition for members and supporters to have their design featured in a new product that will be added to the range: a collaborative centenary blanket-crafting kit for knit and crochet.

To find out more, including terms and conditions and how to enter, visit rbl.org.uk/deramores



VACCINATIONS GATHER PACE

The UK's vaccination programme is going well, with 61% of the adult population vaccinated with a first dose (at the time of going to press) and the goal of offering a vaccine to all eligible adults on course for the end of July.

All residents in the RBL's care homes have now been offered the first dose of the vaccination, with the second round getting underway. This is an amazing achievement by their staff, who were trained by NHS England to administer the vaccine that will keep their residents safe from COVID-19. At Lister House, pictured, RBL nurses administered vaccines alongside the local GP.

Nicola Cook, RBL Assistant Director of Operations, and two of our Admiral Nurses have also been volunteering as vaccinators in their spare time.

The Armed Forces have also played a huge part in this national

effort. During the push to get all priority groups vaccinated, 42 Vaccine Quick Reaction Forces were deployed to support the NHS. Armed Forces planners have assisted the Vaccine Task Force, and 200 service personnel have been supporting the roll-out of the Vaccine Deployment Programme. In Scotland and Wales, the Armed Forces helped to build vaccination centres and support Health Boards.



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MY LEGION

Zoe White
BRUSSELS BRANCH



"I was born in the UK, but when I was in my teens, my family moved to Gibraltar, so that's where I consider home. I didn't come from a military family, but Gibraltar has historically had a garrison, so it was an environment that I felt very comfortable with. I joined the Army and went to Sandhurst in 2000. Then I did 17 years in the Royal Corps of Signals as a commissioned officer, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I was lucky to enter the Army at a really interesting time. I did a tour in Kosovo, three tours in Iraq, three tours in Afghanistan and a tour in Northern Ireland. I spent a lot of time in the operational environment, which was fascinating. It was a huge privilege to be able to command soldiers on operations in a meaningful way. I did all manner of things while on tour, including deploying electronic countermeasures in support of troop safety.

On my last tour in Afghanistan, I was embedded with the US Marine Corps, in Camp Leatherneck. It was very interesting working with the Americans. I was part of a team that was looking at how we transitioned responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces. The aim was more effective communication on the ground between the different uniformed forces, such as the Afghan National Police, the border forces, the special forces and the army. That was a real highlight.



Opposite: Zoe with schoolchildren in Basra, Iraq, 2003
Below: in Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2009

"I want to focus on keeping the branch alive by having more – and more diverse – people in it"

In 2008, I was awarded an MBE for my work in electronic countermeasures (force protection) to counter improvised explosive devices. I was at work when the list came out. There was a flurry of activity in the corridor and, suddenly, there were three different people racing to my office to tell me that I had been given this award. It was a complete surprise. These were very hard operational tours because of the nature of the threat on the ground at the time. It had been really tough for all of the soldiers, so I didn't feel it was my MBE; without wanting to sound trite, it was definitely the result of a massive team effort.

When I left the Army, I moved to Brussels to join NATO in 2017. It never

occurred to me to join the RBL, having just left the military. But somebody whom I had worked with previously, Commodore Darren Bone, was the Chair. He invited me for coffee and asked me to join. The Brussels Branch is absolutely unique. I had made the assumption – incorrectly – that it would be comprised mainly of British people, ex-serving personnel. I was delighted to find out that actually the branch is probably about a 50/50 split between Belgians and Brits.

Among our 80-odd members, we have four Belgian veterans of the Second World War, which is very precious. Some are members because their families have strong historical links to the various events during the



Left: Zoe (second from right) at the Marine Corps Marathon in Helmand, 2011; Right: a socially distanced RBL event at Evere, Belgium, in 2020

“It was important to me to change my title to Chair from Chairman, and everyone was really receptive”

war. There's a really strong, passionate, values-based connection with the UK. This is why it's so special to me; it's a really meaningful link.

Our Belgian members provide stability and continuity. Jean-Pierre Pede has been a member since 1983, and serves as our Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Membership Secretary. His father fought in the Second World War and took part in the Liberation of Brussels in September 1944. Andrée Ferrant, our Honorary Secretary for the past 12 years, is perhaps the best-connected person in Belgium, and her husband was a Belgian commando.

One of the big assets that we've had over the past year is Dennis Abbott, who was previously in the Royal Corps of Signals and served in Iraq. Dennis, a former journalist, has spent an inordinate amount of time researching the history of the branch, its veterans and some current members. These curated histories are then put on our website. We also have a strong local connection with our history; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains 625 cemeteries across Belgium, commemorating those who fell during the First and Second World Wars on Belgian soil.

In September 2020, I was named Chair of the branch. I'm the first female Chair in its history. It was



important to me to change my title to Chair from Chairman and I wasn't sure whether I would get any resistance, but everyone was really receptive. What I still find surprising, though, is the use of Chairman, rather than the gender-free term Chair, across the RBL. If we want to appeal to all people, we have to be relevant for the future and not label things in a gendered way. Our language needs to reflect our values. Our outward-facing comms strategy for the RBL is really good; it's really neutral. So we need to get our terminology right internally as well. If we want to say that we're inclusive, then we actually have to be inclusive in all respects.

I've got big plans for the Brussels Branch. Like everyone else, we're hoping for COVID-19 to lift soon. We're focused on three different areas. The first is recruitment and making

sure that we keep the branch alive by having more, and more diverse, people in it. I've got some fairly ambitious targets – it'd be really nice to get up to about 120 people.

Then we need to make sure that when people have joined, they get something out of it, whether that is attending more social events or more commemorative events. One of the key tenets of the RBL is remembering, and we are here in a place where we can make a significant connection with the past and keep that memory alive. We're looking at building a programme of activities to capture both the Remembrance side and the social side. We want to start a regular programme of battlefield tours; I want us to be out, really deepening our understanding and visiting commemorative sites.

We are also preparing for the 100th birthday of the Brussels Branch in 2022. I would love to be able to hold some kind of large function. There's a beautiful black-and-white picture of a Poppy Ball from the 1950s that is on our website. You can see this incredibly crowded dancefloor and it's really evocative. I would love for us to be able to organise a Poppy Ball like this for our anniversary. I may regret saying that a year from now. But then, what is life if you don't challenge yourself?”

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MEET THE CENTENARIANS

Marking the RBL's centenary year with four members who are celebrating their own 100th birthdays

John Headley

*“A torpedo hit us, flung us in the air and that was the end. *Bedouin* went down. She never came upright and we had to abandon ship”*

Royal Navy veteran John Headley moved to Ireland from England with his late wife Kay and family in the 1960s. He joined the Wicklow Branch of the RBL in 1985 and became a Poppy Appeal Organiser ten years later at the age of 75. He was awarded a Gold Badge in 2012, having raised thousands over the years. “But I can tell you, I was no Captain Tom,” he insists.

The biggest change John has noticed is that the RBL is now accepted as an integral part of Irish society. In the 1980s and early 90s, it was viewed as a non-Catholic, British-based institution for the Protestant minority. “This was the main challenge for our Poppy Appeal: the association between the poppy emblem and Britain,” he says.

As the Northern Ireland conflict ended, RBL activities became more acceptable and therefore more open and inclusive. “Our Poppy Appeal grew from a church and community-based donation model to a broader public street collection,” says John.

Since then, there has been an increase in public interest in World

War anniversary commemorations and the annual national Remembrance Day service at St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, which John attends, as well as the service at his local parish church.

John served on HMS *Bedouin*, and on Remembrance Day his fellow crew members are always in his thoughts. The destroyer was part of Operation Harpoon, a flotilla escorting five merchant ships and an oil tanker in an effort to relieve the siege of Malta in June 1942. South of Sicily, the convoy was engaged by Italian naval forces but fought back.

“HMS *Bedouin* then became the centre of attention for Italian torpedo bombers overhead,” says John. “I was at my action station down below, heard the aircraft go over and then the lads were shouting, ‘We’ve got him!’ I thought, ‘This I must see’, so I popped out, but before I could see the aircraft coming down, there was a shout, ‘Torpedo to starboard!’, and there was the white wake of a torpedo heading straight for us. It hit us, flung us in the air and that was the end. *Bedouin* went

down. She never came upright and we had to abandon ship.”

John was picked up from the sea and imprisoned, first in Italy and later Poland and Germany. Liberated in April 1945, he returned to England in time to take part in the VE Day celebrations outside Buckingham Palace. “The atmosphere was tremendous – the relief as well as the fact that the war was over, it was fantastic,” he says.

One of John's most memorable RBL experiences was meeting former crew in 1992, at the 50th anniversary of the sinking of HMS *Bedouin*, when they had a weekend-long get-together and marched from Wakefield Cathedral to the war memorial to lay a wreath. Another highlight was watching a video of dedications from fellow branch members to mark his 100th birthday last October. “I was really moved and honoured by what they said,” he says. “I’m so proud of our branch for collecting funds to assist ex-servicemen and women and their families. Long may this continue.”

ILLUSTRATIONS: SAM KERR

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Molly Clarke

“I was one of the ‘Ack Ack Girls’ working with anti-aircraft guns and among the very first women to serve on the Home Front in 1941”

Molly Clarke joined the Royal British Legion in 1946 at the age of 25, after serving for four and a half years in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

“My dad suggested I join the RBL,” she says. “He was Chairman of the local branch and we were all very military minded.” In her early days of membership, she carried a Standard for the Women’s Section at parades and Remembrance services. When Molly married her late husband James, they jointly organised the Poppy Appeal for their branch in Wilton, near Salisbury.

“We would have all the poppies here at home in the lead-up to Remembrance Day itself. My dining room would be absolutely full of boxes. Although we’re a small branch, we

never had a problem finding volunteer collectors. They used to do a door-to-door and one girl stood in Wilton market: we would raise between £500 and £1,000 each year,” she says.

When she first joined the RBL, Molly was already experiencing hearing loss after her wartime service as an ‘Ack Ack Girl’ assisting anti-aircraft guns to shoot down incoming enemy bombers. She was one of the very first women to serve on the Home Front.

“I was in the 129 (Mixed) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 1941 to 1945,” says Molly. “It was the first big ack-ack regiment to be formed. We were in Scotland, Yorkshire, and we did three months under canvas in Kent, when the Doodlebugs came over. My

job was to work out the height and range of the aircraft coming in and relay that to the guns. I loved every minute of it!

“We saw a lot of action. We’d do 12-hour shifts, two o’clock to two o’clock. I couldn’t wear earplugs because I wouldn’t hear the order from the command post, so consequently I got the full force of the bangs. When I came out, I had problems with my hearing, along with many other ex-service people, and the RBL helped with that.”

Molly celebrated her 100th birthday on 29th December last year and received a mobility scooter from the RBL the following month. She calls her friends at the Wilton Branch her “lovely Legion family”.



Charles Cuthbert

“Remembrance Day always makes me think of the friends I lost during the Second World War. It’s always very moving”

Charles Cuthbert joined the Brailles Branch in Warwickshire in 1946, at the age of 26, because he realised veterans would need support. “A lot were wounded in action. We got involved in helping them, as well as war widows,” he says. “I enjoyed collecting for the Poppy Appeal.”

Charles joined the Warwickshire Yeomanry in 1936 and, when war broke out, served as a tank driver with the 10th Royal Hussars in the 8th Armoured Division in North Africa – the famous Desert Rats – and fought in the Battle of El Alamein in 1942. In 1945, he went on to join the 16th/5th Queen’s Royal Lancers, and was posted to Allied-occupied Austria at the end of the Nazi regime.

“I lost a few friends during the war, so Remembrance Day always makes me think of them. You form very close friendships in life-or-death situations,” says Charles. “I’ve been to the Cenotaph in London and to local Remembrance events. They’re always very moving, especially when they read out the names of the fallen.”

As well as local branch activities, Charles enjoys the social side of the RBL – he has been on several trips, including a concert at the Royal Albert Hall, and one of his most memorable moments was being reunited with a long-lost friend from wartime on an RBL trip to Portsmouth.

After the Brailles Branch closed, Charles moved to the Shipston-on-

Stour Branch, near the care home where he lives and where he marked his 100th birthday last November. When he looks back over 75 years of membership, he says: “The RBL got bigger, and younger people joined as the veterans got older. It has modernised well; more women are involved now and there’s a magazine instead of the pamphlets we used to have, but I don’t think it has changed that much.”

His proudest memories of being in the RBL are marching with a band to the war memorial. Mostly, though, he enjoys the fellowship of being a member: “It is just nice being part of something, spending time with people who have had similar experiences, whom you can talk to.”

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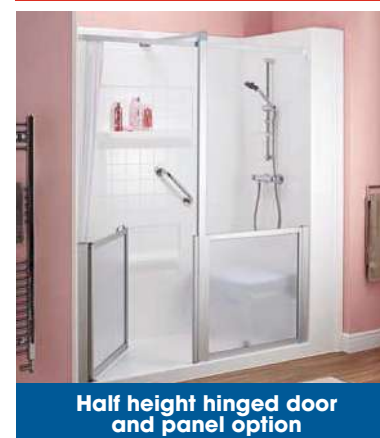
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Stanley Elliss

“We need to better communicate the support the RBL offers veterans and their families, from the cradle to the grave”

The RBL-organised MV *Boudicca* cruise to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings in 2019 was the prompt for D-Day veteran Stanley Elliss to join the organisation at the age of 97. His daughter Sue, who had seen the cruise advertised in the newspaper, accompanied her father on the trip. A highlight was the memorial service in Bayeux on 6th June, attended by veterans, royalty and politicians. “It was so moving,” says Stan, who was a Commando-trained RAF Sergeant. “There are fewer and fewer of us old ones left and it’s so good to be able to relive our memories together.”

As a 22-year-old, Stan waded onto Gold Beach near Arromanches under enemy fire on 7th June, 1944, part of

a unit briefed to capture a nearby German airstrip at Bénvy-sur-Mer and make it ready for Spitfire squadrons supporting the Allied invasion.

“When we got onto the beach, we had to duck down because of a sniper in the church as we approached on the shore. German aircraft were dropping anti-personnel bombs around us and all we had for shelter was a hole in the ground, but I wasn’t there for very long, fortunately. Apart from that, a ship carrying some of our personnel and all of our equipment, including our kitchen, was sunk, so we had very little in the way of rations for a few weeks,” says Stan, who received the Légion d’honneur for his part in the operation.

The airstrip was taken over and fitted out successfully, despite Stan’s unit being under almost continuous enemy fire. They then headed for Burma to prepare for the invasion of Japan. This was curtailed by the dropping of the atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US forces on 6th and 9th August, 1945.

Stan was demobbed in 1946 and worked for many years at Wye College, an agricultural school in Kent, where he lives and is still an active gardener. He has made contact with another RBL member locally who’s involved in the Poppy Appeal, and is looking forward to his first meeting at the Brabourne and Smeeth Branch – and his 100th birthday celebrations this October.

“YOU HAVE GIVEN ME HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE”

The Royal British Legion has captured a definitive place in British society as the guardian of Remembrance and the protector of the Armed Forces community. Members, volunteers and some notable supporters share their stories and offer birthday wishes to the charity they love

**Mubarik Chowdry
Warwick and
Leamington Spa Branches**

“I take this opportunity to wish the Royal British Legion a happy 100th birthday; it’s a huge achievement. The organisation has been working extremely hard providing essential support for so many members of our Armed Forces and their families, whose lives have greatly benefited from its care. I have witnessed and worked with volunteers who have enjoyed offering many hours to the

Poppy Appeal. I am also proud that the Royal British Legion has worked alongside many people from diverse communities and shown recognition of all our members of the Armed Forces, including those from the Commonwealth nations. It has also done outstanding work in the past years to bring alive fascinating archive video footage and documents. Thank you for the commitment of the past 100 years; long may you continue. I am proud and honoured to be a member of the RBL family.”



PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORGE BROOKS,
WWW.ROYALIMAGES.CO.UK



HM The Queen

The RBL's Patron HM The Queen wrote, in her dedication to *We Are The Legion*, the charity's official centenary publication:

“On the centenary of its formation, I send my heartfelt congratulations to the Royal British Legion at home and overseas, and commend its one hundred years of service to the Armed Forces community”

Lynne White

Volunteer at RBL care home Galanos House

"I've been volunteering at Galanos House for 11 years now. I started when my mother was a resident; my father had been in the Army. Before I retired, I ran a pub and we used to host the local RBL branch meetings. We do all sorts with the residents: crafting, reading the newspapers, visiting the garden centre. Over lockdown, we've done Zoom meetings, but it's not the same. I really miss going in. The RBL is so important because it helps get people together and share their stories. Everyone in the home has similar interests and they can connect. I hope the charity keeps going for another 100 years – my husband and I already have our names down at Galanos!"

"The RBL is so important because it helps get people together and share their stories. Everyone at Galanos House has similar interests"



Lieutenant General James Bashall CB CBE National President

"Inspired by a young soldier and a Field Marshal, the British Legion was formed to lead the fight for justice and support on behalf of the ex-services community. Over the past 100 years, many thousands of selfless men and women have worked to deliver the charity's noble objectives, representing every level of society and military rank. Born into hard times, it has provided compassion, relief and comfort to millions of beneficiaries through to present times. Today, I am proud and honoured to hold the appointment of National President, as we continue our important work in support of the nation's veterans."

Steve Munday Chief Petty Officer, Royal Navy (pictured below, on right)

"I am proud to be sharing my birthday with the Royal British Legion and I'm looking forward to supporting any centenary events that I can. My involvement with the RBL began in 2012, when I was a volunteer for London Poppy Day. I was absolutely stunned by the generosity shown to us by the public. Since my first involvement, I have become the lead for Royal Navy personnel volunteering for London Poppy Day, and have taken our attendance from 20 to more than 200. I really enjoy fundraising and knowing the money supports veterans from all conflicts, whom I have so much respect for. We have a shared kinship from proudly wearing our uniforms, but we wore them in different eras, and I can't imagine the hardships they would have been through."



David Beckham OBE

(pictured above at the Invictus Games in Sydney, 2018)
"It is incredible that we are celebrating 100 years of the Royal British Legion. I have been privileged to work with the charity and to get involved with the Poppy Appeal, and have seen first-hand the amazing work that makes such a difference to people's lives. It's so important that we remember those who have served our country and support the RBL's vital work for our veterans and Armed Forces. Happy Birthday!"



Percival Smith

St James's Branch

(pictured above, second from left, on MV Cromwell in 1945)

"I was 16 when the Second World War began, and still at school. It wasn't until 1942 that I joined the Merchant Navy. I spent most of my time on tankers, perhaps the most hazardous job for seamen during the war. I spent more than four years of my life with an interesting group of men who faced almost daily the threat of death, and nearly every one of them put the welfare of the Navy before his own. For this, I am very fortunate. More than 25 years ago, I became a member of the Royal British Legion. It affords many benefits for veterans. Most importantly, it ensures that attention is paid to the welfare of all who have served; sees to the maintenance and comfort of those who require special treatment, particularly the disabled, sick, aged and needy; and promotes the welfare of their dependants. My congratulations on the RBL's 100th anniversary."

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Heather Spence
Chairman, Women's Section
"It fills me with immense pride to look back at what the organisation has achieved over the past 100 years. As members, we have used our skills and compassion, and have seen how our work has greatly improved the lives of ex-servicemen and women and their families. My hope is that we will continue to live up to our Women's Section motto of 'Service not Self'."



Juliet Price
Advice and Information Officer
(pictured above right)
"How amazing and privileged I feel to work for a charity that is celebrating its 100th birthday. We must be doing something right! It's overwhelming to think of the colleagues that came before me and those who will come after. We are committed to supporting our services in the best way possible. We could not do our jobs without the brilliant support of the general public, who have given so generously."

Joe Falzon
National Vice Chairman
"Any momentous birthday deserves a great party. Wherever you are in the world, the Board of Trustees cordially invites you to celebrate with us on 15th May, 2021. We hope you will display flags, bunting and balloons, and feast on delicious cake and beverages. Members, volunteers and staff, the Women's Section, the Youth Section, Parade Marshals and Standard Bearers, and the Legion Bands – all are welcome. And while we can't accept gifts, donations to the Poppy Appeal are always gratefully received!"

PHOTOGRAPHY: GERAINT LEWIS

BIRTHDAY WISHES



"Bravo 22 Company and the RBL have given me hope for a better future and lifted me up out of my personal darkness"

Sallyanne

Bravo 22 Company member, supported by the RBL
"A few years ago, I accessed assistance from the RBL as a military wife. At that time, I was sadly in a poor state of physical and mental health, and really struggling. Within hours, I had been assigned a support worker, who assisted me tremendously and relieved so much pressure. Soon afterwards, the RBL introduced me to Bravo 22 Company [pictured above], a programme of recovery through the arts and theatre. This changed my outlook on life forever. It gave me the strength and courage I needed to begin a degree in fine art. Many of the skills I have learnt there are transferable, which will enable me to follow my ambition to become an art therapist working alongside veterans, helping and assisting them in their recovery and transition into civilian life. Bravo 22 Company and the Royal British Legion have given me hope for a better future and lifted me up out of my own personal darkness. So it is with most heartfelt gratitude that I wish the RBL a very happy 100th birthday and many more to come."



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Kyle Toolan

**Welfare volunteer, PAO and
Chairman, Kidderminster Branch**

"When I was in the RAF, I used to attend the Remembrance Day Parade. I'd look at the RBL members and think, 'I really should get involved.' After I left the Forces, I joined up, which was about six or seven years ago, and I became a case worker. When you start talking to the people who have reached out for help, even if they're asking about a new washing machine, you can assess the base problems. I'm 41, so I'm one of the younger members. I have a four-year-old son [pictured with Kyle, above], and every Remembrance Day I take him to lay a wreath. His school are great supporters of the local Poppy Appeal, and I think it's really important that we get the younger generations involved with Remembrance. The RBL's work is as important now as it was in 1921 – perhaps even more so. We have a much greater awareness of the mental-health issues facing the Armed Forces community now. It's challenging, but I'm proud to be a part of it."

Nick Purkis
Chairman, LGBTQ+
& Allies Branch

"I joined the Royal Naval Reserve in 1998, when it was still illegal to be gay in the Armed Forces, and I would have been amazed to discover then that 23 years later, the law would have changed and I would be Chairman of the RBL's LGBTQ+ & Allies Branch. The amendment in the law is one of many changes that have occurred in the RBL's 100 years, but the formation of our branch is a fantastic example of how the organisation has moved with the times, to keep itself relevant to new generations of veterans and allies. I am proud to be a member of the RBL and Chair of our branch."

“The formation of the LGBTQ+ & Allies Branch is a fantastic example of how the RBL has moved with the times”



THE STORY OF US

Tales of the people, branches and communities that make up the Royal British Legion in its 100th year

The Royal British Legion holds a special place in the nation's heart. Our branches and clubs have been at the centre of local communities for a century, bringing generations of people together and forming an incredible network that spans the globe. All these people have a shared purpose – to support the Armed Forces community.

The RBL stories of our members, volunteers and staff stretch back over the past 100 years. In *Telling Our Story*, you can read about how the Legion supports and is intrinsically woven into local communities. As we celebrate and look to the next 100 years, there are plenty of examples that tell the story of how we have grown and changed. These range from our active commitment to diversity and inclusion, to engaging with schools, youth associations and cadet forces and encouraging the next generation of members.

Telling Our Story is an online showcase of the hundreds of contributions that the RBL has received over the past year. You can visit it at rbl.org.uk/tellingourstory.

This is the story of the RBL – its people, its branches, its community. *Legion* is pleased to bring you a glimpse of some of the outstanding tales from this remarkable collection.

From above, clockwise: a young girl at the Poppy Factory village; Sheila Lloyd-Graham was inspired by her grandmother, a dedicated fundraiser; handing out materials to poppy sellers; the eternal flame is rekindled at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris



PHOTOGRAPHY: STEPHEN MORGAN, MATT ALEXANDER

“Our branches and clubs have been at the centre of local communities for a century, bringing generations together”



The Central Band

In 2021, the Central Band of the Royal British Legion is celebrating its 77th year. The band began in 1944 with a group of musicians gathered at the bar of the British Legion Club in Epsom. They had all been members of the 56th (Surrey) Battalion, Home Guard, which had recently been stood down, bringing to an end four years of comradeship. They resolved to form a new band under the British Legion.

It took 10 years to raise funds for uniforms, and a secondhand music library was gradually acquired. The Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, was the band's first President. In 1970, the band won a gold medal at the prestigious World Music Concert in Holland, and in 1973, it made its first album at Abbey Road Studios.

In 1983, the Director of Music at Kneller Hall was asked by the RBL to assess Legion bands across the country to find the 'National Band'. The one originally formed in Epsom was awarded the highest marks. Three years later, its title was changed to the Central Band of the Royal British Legion.

The band, led by Captain David Cole, has entertained D-Day veterans on the MV *Boudicca*, performed at Bayeux with Rod Stewart, and worked with Alfie Boe, Laura Wright, the Bach Choir, Max Bygraves, Liberace and Harry Secombe. All its members are volunteers, many veterans, who readily give of their time to support the RBL.





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Vera Parnaby

The Consett and District Branch was responsible for the Christmas party that sparked 76 years of service for Vera Parnaby. Vera's father, George Richardson, was killed in service in 1942, during the Second World War, and after a party for war widows in 1945, several of the women re-formed the Consett and District Women's Section.

Every Remembrancetide, Vera and her siblings would help with the Poppy Appeal, and she recalls being allowed to sell poppies by herself once she reached the age of 14. Her mother Annie became the Standard Bearer for their WS Branch, and served as such until she was 84.

"As the years went by," writes Vera, "I was so interested in the work of the WS I joined as a member and soon joined the branch committee. We children got married and had children of our own, and the outings and parties were extended."

Vera took over organising the sales of goods for Disabled Men's Industries (DMI, the forerunner of the Poppy Shop). She was promoted to DMI Secretary, a position she held for many years.

Over her decades as a member, Vera has undertaken many positions of responsibility in the WS, helped to raise incredible sums for the Poppy Appeal, and met HM The Queen along with other members of the Central Committee at a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.



Vera (left) received Durham County Council's Chairman's Medal in 2013

TELLING OUR STORY



The human poppy

For more than five decades, Galanos House, the flagship Royal British Legion care home located in Warwickshire, has supported veterans and their family members through the most challenging of circumstances. In 2017, it celebrated its 50th anniversary with a Guinness World Record attempt.

Working with Southam College, a local school, Galanos put out the call for 2,500 people to try and form the largest-ever human flower. It was, of course, to be in the shape of the emblematic RBL poppy. Members of the public, schoolchildren, the Army, the local Scouts group, the Women's Institute and Galanos House residents and staff all came together to achieve a wonderful display of community and support. Each person taking part was given a coloured poncho, and the shape of the poppy was drawn to scale on the school playing fields to help create the spectacle.

The event culminated with 2,609 people aged between two and 100 years old forming the giant human poppy. Although the record was deemed to be an 'unofficial record', there was so much more achieved that day. The human-poppy day was about bringing people together, strengthening community ties and supporting the amazing work of the RBL.

"2,609 people aged between two and 100 years old formed the giant human poppy"

A black and white portrait of Fred Lister, a man with short dark hair, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera.


THE FIGHT TO CHANGE LIVES FOR THE BETTER

One hundred years ago, Earl Haig and Fred Lister joined forces to transform the fortunes of ex-servicemen, with the creation of the British Legion. Julie Summers, historian and author of *We Are The Legion*, uncovers the story

OUR FOUNDERS

Fred Lister (opposite)
and Earl Haig, founders
of the British Legion

PHOTOGRAPHY: MCCOY WYNNE PHOTOGRAPHY, GETTY IMAGES

A black and white portrait of Earl Haig, a man with a mustache, wearing a military uniform with a high collar and a belt. He is holding a military helmet in his left hand.

The Royal British Legion has always been about individuals. At the heart of this generous-spirited organisation are men and women who are singularly driven to fulfil its aims, and none more so than the two men who helped to create it 100 years ago. The first was Field Marshal Douglas Haig, or, to give him his full title, Earl Haig KT, GCB, OM, GCVO, KCIE, 29th Laird of Bemersyde. The second was a former Lance-Bombardier of immense physical and intellectual stature, Mr TF Lister. We will give him his full title as well: Sir Thomas Frederick Lister CBE.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Haig was in command of 1 Corps (later First Army) of the British Expeditionary Force. By the end of 1915, he was Commander-in-Chief of the British Army on the Western Front. His work on behalf of the ex-service community began during the war, and his concern for the future of his men was well-founded. They returned to appalling conditions in Britain and many who had been invalided out of the Army were sent back as 'fit', such was the shortage of manpower.

Haig was also exercised by the demobilisation programme at the end of the war that saw 'key workers'

released first in order to get industry up and running. He saw this as a gross injustice and proposed as early as 1917 that demobilisation be based on age and length of service. He was also very concerned with the plight of the wives and children of those who had fallen.

In the later years of the war, three organisations emerged to fight for the interests of the returning ex-servicemen. These were The British National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers; the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers; and The Comrades of the Great War. Initially, there was no love lost between them, but after

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“Haig could come across as remote, but nothing was further from the truth. He would spend hours every day going over individual cases, replying to letters by hand, always insisting on sympathy and generosity”

the war, in 1920, they began to think about working together. A fourth organisation, founded by Haig, was The Officers Association.

It was Haig's view that “the ex-service organisations had no business to be quarrelling amongst themselves but must come together and work for the common cause”, and he threw his weight behind the unifying project. Fred Lister, who was then President of the Federation, chaired a conference with the other organisations in August 1920, and an agreement to found a single organisation, the British Legion, was thrashed out in the spring of 1921.

Delegates from each body attended the Unity Conference at Queen's Hall in London on 14th May, 1921. The Prince of Wales was elected as Patron, Haig as President and Lister as Chairman, a decision that was greeted with unanimous and loud approval by the attendees. The following morning, representatives of the four organisations joined the new President and Chairman to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph as a sign of their commitment to work together.

Haig was determined that the provision for ex-servicemen should be universal. In a speech given in Manchester in December 1921, he said: “Every ex-serviceman, whether he be British born, or born in one of the Dominions or Colonies, belongs not to any one of these, but to the British Empire as a whole.”

Although Haig could come across as remote, even austere, nothing could have been further from the truth. He would spend hours every day going over individual cases, replying to letters by hand, always insisting on sympathy and generosity.



The Duke of York (left), who later became the RBL's Patron as King George VI, with Fred Lister and Earl Haig in 1924

Lister had served with the Royal Garrison Artillery on the Western Front but had been invalided out of the Army in 1916 after being badly wounded. Although only in his early thirties, Lister was not fazed by men who were his senior in age or rank.

Standing at 6 foot 6½ inches, he was taller by a head at least than the average man for the age. A profile of Lister appeared in the first edition of the Legion's Journal in July 1921: “He arrests attention and compels respect. It is not so much that he is by way of being a physical giant, but he at all times displays an easy and effortless command of himself and of any subject he tackles.” Lister also knew how to head off dissent. When the threat of unrest arose during the General Strike of 1926, it was he who held the Legion to a moderate course.

Like Haig and the other early Legion office holders, Lister gave his time freely and voluntarily. Unlike

Haig, Lister was not retired, so he also worked full time in the accident department of the Liverpool and London Globe Insurance Company. He spent most of his free time attending to Legion business. He said, years later: “I think that the secret of Legion success has been the fact that we have attracted to it men who, outside of their daily occupations, are determined to place the Legion first in their thoughts, and who really and genuinely want to do service in peace, just as they did service in the war.”

Haig was supportive of the idea behind the Great Pilgrimage of 1928, which would see 11,000 people visit the battlefields of France and Belgium, marking the 10th anniversary of the Hundred Days Offensive. His sudden death in January 1928 at the age of 66 robbed the pilgrims of his presence; just the day before, he had been at the Poppy Factory in Richmond to inspect a troop of Scouts. The whole country grieved. “His loss is great,” Colonel George Crosfield, then National Chairman, wrote, “but his work will endure and the Legion, which is his finest memorial, will continue to grow, inspired by his underlying memory.”

Lister continued to work tirelessly for the Legion until his death in 1966 at the age of 79. He was knighted for this work in 1961, an honour many felt was long overdue. He is remembered for almost half a century of devotion to the organisation he helped to found 100 years ago.

Julie Summers is a historian and author of 14 books, including The Colonel of Tamarkan, the true story of the Bridge over the River Kwai, and Remembered, a history of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

“WE NEED ALL COMMUNITIES TO SEE US AS AN OPEN DOOR”

Today, the Royal British Legion remains as vital as ever and continues to pioneer new ways of providing for the Armed Forces community, campaigning for their interests and promoting Remembrance. But our work is by no means done

As the largest Armed Forces charity in the UK, with thousands of members across many branches, the RBL has an unmatched ability to understand the needs of the Armed Forces community and to extend a helping hand.

Dedicated teams located in its national headquarters in London, Haig House, and across the UK, means specialist support is on hand when and where it is needed. “We are made up of members, volunteers and staff based in branches, Counties and central office,” says Director General Charles Byrne, “and I see this as a cohesive force bringing people together to support,

commemorate and celebrate our Armed Forces community.”

Today, the RBL’s three-fold mission remains unchanged from the purposes that were established at the organisation’s creation: to provide for the Armed Forces community in need, to campaign in their interest, and to remember and honour their service and sacrifice. However, the methods we use to accomplish these duties have had to adapt to a changing and often challenging environment.

Confronted by a veterans’ community with increasingly complex needs, the RBL has forged new pathways and partnerships with other

service charities to ensure those seeking help are directed to those best placed to provide it. It has focused on giving those who come to the RBL – whether in need, as volunteers, as supporters or as members – a smooth, personalised journey. And the charity has undergone a root-and-branch review of its services and ways of working to ensure it is delivering the best outcomes for the needs of the Armed Forces community.

From the outset, the RBL has been a vigorous campaigner on behalf of veterans’ interests. In the past decade, its efforts scored two victories that will carry a legacy long into the future –



Fundraising for the Poppy Appeal takes many forms: collections at transport hubs in 2019 (top left); Tariq Malik (above right), who supports the RBL through the Ahmadiyya Muslim Elders Association Charity Walk for Peace Initiative; and a very different Poppy Appeal in 2020 (bottom left). Fundraising ensures that the RBL’s life-changing support, such as that at the Battle Back Centre (above right) can continue

PHOTOGRAPHY: OLLIE SMALLWOOD, CHARLIE CLIFT, GARY MOYES, STUART WOOD

the Honour the Covenant campaign of 2011 and the Count Them In campaign of 2020.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pact that the Armed Forces shall never abandon the nation and that the nation will provide its Armed Forces with fair treatment in return. It holds that where a current or former member of the Armed Forces, or their family, has been disadvantaged because of their service, special measures can be taken to correct this inequality.

After a vigorous campaign by the RBL, these principles were enshrined in law in 2011. The charity established a lasting foothold for the standard of

treatment for service personnel, veterans and their families, and others rushed to sign covenants of their own.

This year, the RBL will undertake a national health check of the Armed Forces Covenant after its first decade, to see where it has been successful and where improvements can be made.

In 2020, its campaign to include a question on military service in the national census met with hard-won success. The information gathered will inform decision-making on Government support to veterans and provide valuable insights for all Armed Forces charities. For the RBL, it will combine with the detailed results

from its periodic in-depth surveys to provide a useful understanding of the changing needs of the Armed Forces community.

Today, the RBL continues to campaign on behalf of service personnel and their families who were recruited from the Commonwealth, calling on Government to waive their application fees to settle in the UK after four years of service. These fees can exceed £10,000 for a family of four, despite years of service and sacrifice on behalf of the nation.

At the time of the British Legion’s formation in 1921, the size of the ex-services community (veterans and

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The RBL's support for families is wide-ranging, from helping them to attend the Invictus Games to our Stop the Service Charge campaign

“The Royal British Legion, as always, has responded to a changing environment with alacrity and inventiveness”

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL CLEMENT, STEPHEN MORGAN, THEO COHEN

their families) was estimated to be 20 million strong, and the charity accepted a duty of care towards them all. According to the RBL's most recent household survey in 2014, this number has fallen substantially, but still comprises 6.2 million people. Unlike the aftermath of the First World War, however, this community is no longer young – nearly half of them are over the age of 75, reflecting the numbers conscripted in the Second World War and for National Service.

Caring for the increasingly complex needs of this generation – and indeed for veterans of all ages – falls to a network of RBL advisors, carers and support workers; to its members in the community; and to partnerships that offer specialised expertise and support.

The RBL, as always, has responded to a changing environment with alacrity and inventiveness. In response to the returning injured from Afghanistan and Iraq, for instance, it funded research into blast injuries; it also operates an adventure-training and sports centre, and provides support to family and friends joining athletes at the Invictus Games. For its older veterans, it is expanding its capacity for dementia patients in its care homes, provides respite nurses for carers, and pioneers new approaches to dementia care.

These commendable efforts are complemented by the RBL's real strength – the day-to-day support offered to those who need help with family finances, job-seeking, pensions, compensation and navigating the

complicated world of benefits.

Not to be overlooked is the work of its members in the community tackling social isolation among older veterans and keeping an eye on their welfare. National Chairman Una Cleminson knows how crucial this is: “Our membership can spot first-hand the needs of our beneficiaries.” This support at the branch level has come to the fore during the COVID-19 crisis, when members helped to organise community care for the elderly and most vulnerable in their midst.

Remarkably, all the symbols and ceremonies of Remembrance today are the same as they were at the British Legion's foundation – Remembrance Day, the poppy, the Cenotaph ceremony, the Grave of the Unknown

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Warrior and the Two Minute Silence. Services of Remembrance are deeply embedded in tradition and in the fabric of the nation. "To me, the RBL will never allow us to forget the debt we owe to those who enable us to be free men and women today," says Una. "We need to hold the torch high and shine it into many dark places."

While the RBL respects and reinforces these traditions, it is also exploring newer ways to remember for younger and more diverse audiences, ensuring that Remembrance is representative of modern Britain.

In recent years, it has partnered with the National Literacy Trust to develop learning resources and activities (pictured below right) to help young people understand the meaning of Remembrance. These reached some 1.8 million at home and in schools during 2020. The RBL also offers popular Remembrance-themed activity packs to Guides, Scouts and cadets.

In 2018, the charity worked with Lord Jitesh Gadhia to develop a poppy in tribute to the huge contribution of pre-partition India during the two World Wars. It was identical to the Remembrance poppy except it was made from khadi, the homespun cloth associated with Gandhi, and it proved a popular avenue to Remembrance for Britain's Asian community.

"The RBL is exploring ways to ensure that Remembrance is representative of modern Britain"



Since then, the RBL has worked with interfaith and multi-ethnic groups to convey the message that Remembrance is for all, and that it specifically recognises the contribution of Commonwealth nations in the World Wars of the 20th century.

Through the National Memorial Arboretum, it is also reflecting modern concerns and approaches to Remembrance. The NMA is home to memorials to Polish forces who served under British command and to British victims of terrorism overseas, and hosts a calm and peaceful Remembrance Glade, where individuals can engage in personal acts of reflection.

The RBL of today and tomorrow will be more unified, even as it takes on a diversity of approaches to its work; more focused on providing brighter futures for the people it helps; and more responsive in its campaigning and Remembrance work, even as it maintains valued traditions.

"My vision for the future is that we will continue to be a whole of many parts," says Charles. "We will continue to work with all our people and networks to provide better outcomes for those who need our help; to continue to hold Government to account; and to celebrate the service, sacrifice and commitment of our Armed Forces."

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK ALLAN

A LEGION THAT'S OPEN TO ALL

A robust Diversity and Inclusion culture, to be embedded throughout the RBL, is essential to its future

The RBL has always sought to represent and reflect our Armed Forces and society more widely. Inclusivity and representation are core to Remembrance, our work and who we are.

"As in the words of The Charge, the Union Flag on the Legion Standard is symbolic of our unity and our loyalty to the crown, community and nation. That commitment and loyalty make the Legion a powerful, cohesive and inclusive force for good," says Charles. Una agrees: "We need to be diverse. We need all communities to see us as an open door."

The RBL has appointed its first Head of Diversity and Inclusion, who will look at every aspect of the charity to create a more inclusive and open organisation. This will deliver an excellent service for those we support, and, crucially, persuade them that the RBL is worth coming to for help.



Veteran Maurillia Simpson, Lance Corporal, Royal Logistics Corps, who suffered life-changing injuries but went on to triumph in the 2014 Invictus Games

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TOP SECRET

The amazing story of how sisters Jean and Patricia Owtram both worked in codebreaking roles during the Second World War, but didn't breathe a word to each other until decades later

Patricia Owtram (left), Chief Petty Officer, Y Service, WRNS, 1942-1945, and Jean Owtram (right), Ensign, First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, SOE, 1943-1945

P

Patricia: When the war started, I wasn't yet 18, and I was worried that it would end before I could actually get into the Women's Forces, but of course it didn't. There was a feeling that it was a wonderful chance to join the Armed Forces, which women didn't have in peacetime.

We were very keen to get involved in winning the war. My Uncle Charles, who was a Navy Captain and my godfather, said, "Of course, the girls will want to join the Wrens," and I thought he was quite right. I'd just left school, and I had to fill my time with a secretarial course before I turned 18. As soon as I did, I volunteered and, to my delight, I was accepted.

Jean: I was born after the end of the First World War, but of course people were still talking about it. I remember when I was about to become a teenager, I thought that I'd missed all the big, important things, and that life would be very boring. So when the war started, it was almost like, "now it's your turn".

I was 14 when the war began, so I had to wait four years to join up. I made enquiries with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), and when I turned 18, they wrote to me and asked if I was still interested in joining them.

Patricia: Because I spoke German, I was signed up to be a linguist with Y Service [signals intelligence] after I did my basic training for the Wrens. I always had a facility with languages. From an early age, I felt that you could easily switch from one to another, because my grandmother used to speak French and English. I'd learned German from two young Austrian women, Edith and Lilly, who came to work at our home in the 1930s. They were both Jewish and had been forced to leave their homes by the rise of the Nazis in mainland Europe. It never occurred to me that the German they taught me would turn out to be so useful.

I became a Special Duties Linguist, which came with immediate promotion to Petty Officer. My first posting was Withernsea, in the East Riding of Yorkshire. There were 26 Y-stations along the east and south coasts of England, where we



searched the German navy's radio wavelength. When we picked up a message, we wrote it down, and if it was operational, we passed it to the nearest naval intelligence centre.

Jean: When I joined FANY, one of the questions the interviewer asked me was, "Do you like crossword puzzles?" Crosswords were something I'd done all my life. My mother was very good at the ones in *The Times*, and we did them with her. So after I was accepted into FANY, working on codes and ciphers became my job.

My first posting was at the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which was headquartered on London's Baker Street. Its purpose was to coordinate espionage and reconnaissance work in occupied Europe and Southeast Asia, and support local resistance fighters. My role was

Above: Jean, left, and Patricia at their family home, January 1944

"The war did a tremendous amount for women in Britain. I would never have gone to university otherwise"

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to decipher messages that came in via teleprinter from agents in the field.

In January 1944, I was promoted to Ensign and sent to Cairo, Egypt. My office worked principally with the underground resistance in mainland Greece, in the Baltic States and in Crete. We also relayed mainline traffic regarding Egypt to London and other offices in North Africa. I came to recognise certain codenames and had a real sense of the agents in the field as individuals. I became increasingly aware of the importance of deciphering messages that had 'gone wrong' and were corrupted, since they meant that the agent was likely to be in danger and needed backup.

Patricia: In 1943, I was sent off on a course to learn direction-finding, one of the most important skills an interceptor could learn.

In the days before radar, direction-finding using specially calibrated aerials was the best way of calculating the position of an enemy vessel. We would work out which direction a signal was coming from by following it until it faded. If another station picked up the same ship, we could triangulate its position using both our readings. Once I'd qualified, I went to Abbots Cliff at Capel Le Ferne, Kent, which went by the naval name HMS Lynx.

Jean: At the end of March 1944, I left Egypt for Italy. It was my first time in an aeroplane and I was very excited indeed. I was stationed with several other FANY coders and wireless operators in Torre a Mare, a small fishing village. Our office's role was to support resistance fighters directly across the Adriatic in the Balkans. The resistance movement in Yugoslavia was riven by infighting,

but the Allies were concentrated on helping the Communist Partisans, led by the charismatic First World War hero Josip Broz, known as 'Tito'.

Our traffic was largely to do with keeping Tito's people supplied with everything they needed: machine guns and ammunition, medical supplies and sometimes food, which was dropped in by parachute. From time to time, we even got a visit from Tito himself; although he was supposed to be incognito, he was given away by his huge German shepherd, called Tigger, who always travelled with him.

Patricia: If I received a message in Enigma Code, I would take it down exactly, then another Wren would take it to a teleprinter and send it immediately to Bletchley Park. It was impressed on all of us how important these messages were. If I couldn't hear a word, or it was distorted, I always left a blank; you could never guess at the word, because guesses were no use – they needed absolute accuracy.

We saw lots of the preparations for D-Day from Abbots Cliff. We watched convoys of empty landing craft being moved into position, and we saw a section of one of the Mulberry harbours – temporary floating harbours, which would service our supply ships – being hauled towards Portsmouth. It looked like an upside-down table with long, spindly legs.

One night in the late spring of 1944, I had an interesting encounter. I'd just finished a night shift and was getting some fresh air when I saw a small group of Army staff officers walking towards me. The man in the middle looked very familiar... and then I realised it was Winston Churchill! He was flanked by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery,

Below: Patricia and Jean look over wartime letters and photos. Both sisters signed the Official Secrets Act and didn't find out about the other's war work for several decades

“I'd done the crossword all my life, and working on codes and ciphers became my job in SOE”



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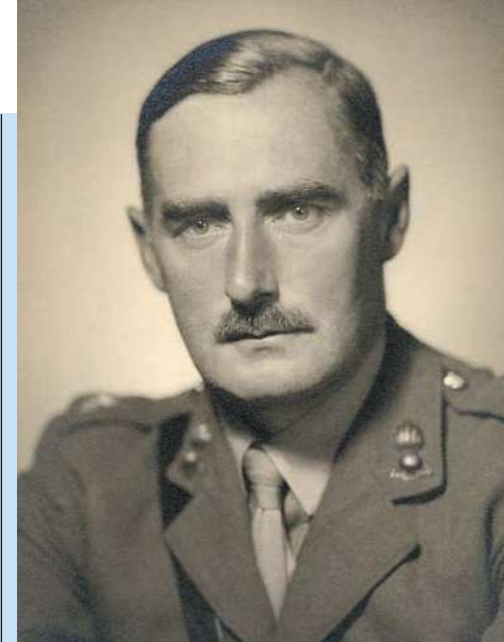


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BADGE OF HONOUR



"More than 2,500 men of our father's regiment had died as prisoners of war"

'Monty', the commander of all Allied ground forces, in his distinctive black beret.

D-Day was a very long time in the planning. In the run-up, radio transmissions containing fake information about the Allies' plans were broadcast in order to deceive the Germans into diverting some of their troops away from Normandy. On 5th June, the watch room at Abbots Cliff was full of senior naval officers. There was no news for hours on end. We had to rely on the BBC like everyone else.

D-Day struck a killer blow to German dominance in northern Europe, but we knew the war was far from over. Our father had been taken as a prisoner of war with his regiment at the Fall of Singapore in 1942, which had been shattering news for the whole family. Once he'd been imprisoned, in Chungkai Camp, Thailand, there were several years when we had no contact with him.

In May 1945, I was in London for VE Day. Of course, it was a day of huge jubilation, but as Churchill had reminded the nation in his address, the Japanese fought on. It wouldn't be until VJ Day that the Owtrams could truly celebrate.

Jean: After VE Day, my departure from Italy was scheduled for the end of June. Then, in August, came the wonderful news of the Japanese surrender to the Allies. Our father was finally coming home. He returned by sea, because it gave the men time to get used to the idea of being safe and with their families again. His ship docked in Liverpool on 12th October, 1945.

We were excited but nervous to see him again. We had no real idea what to expect. He was very tanned and thin, but he was instantly recognisable. Our joy at seeing him safely home was tempered by thoughts of all those who had not made it



Top left: Colonel Cary Owtram, Patricia and Jean's father
Above: The Owtrams' memoir *Codebreaking Sisters: Our Secret War* is available for Legion readers with 20% off from mirrorbooks.co.uk with the code SB7

back. More than 2,500 men of the 137th Field Regiment had died.

Patricia: He had been appointed British Camp Commandant and was the main contact between the prisoners and their Japanese guards. I think having a responsible job had helped keep him very busy and active. He kept a secret diary all through the camp, which Jean and I had published in 2017.

Jean: When I think back on the war now, I definitely got to see more of life than I would have at home. I was doing an adult's job in the Army, when normally I'd have been at school and then looking for something to do. After the war, I wanted to be independent and get a job, which I did, working with refugees in London. I missed my war work and the people I'd met, but I was very lucky that I got to travel and do other things. Life went on being interesting.

Patricia: The war did a tremendous amount for women in Britain. I would never have gone to university if it wasn't for the war. The Government gave grants to ex-servicemen and women, so I went to St Andrews University, and then I did a BLitt at Oxford and an MA at Harvard. I had a much more interesting time in my early twenties than I might have done; just being someone's secretary wouldn't have been nearly as good.

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NAVY

738 KINGS SQUAD, ROYAL MARINES

12th-14th August.
The belated 60th reunion will take place this year. Thursday: arrive at accommodation, evening informal get-together. Friday: coach to CTCRM to witness Green Beret presentation and King's Squad Passing for Duty, followed by lunch and drinks, then a semi-formal dinner in the evening. Saturday: free day. Members of the 738 who have not received an itinerary from Roger should contact him for details. **Contact Roger (Taff) Sheppard on 01656 670224 or shep9409@gmail.com**

HMS OCEAN ASSOCIATION

17th-19th September.
All R68 and L12 crew and partners welcome. Stays of one to three nights available, including food and entertainment. More details to be confirmed later this year. **Contact Jo Harlow for updates at joharlow76@gmail.com**

849 NAVAL AIR SQUADRON GANNETS

New dates: 23rd-26th September, Hotel Mariners, Haverfordwest. All veterans, serving members, partners and guests welcome. **Contact John Rawling at rendrive71@gmail.com**

HMS LOWESTOFT ASSOCIATION

New dates: 1st-4th October, Best Western Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea. 10th reunion, including gala dinner. All who served in Lowestoft during her RN service (1961-86) 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! **Booking details to come, or contact ian@hmslowestoft.uk**

846 NAVAL AIR SQUADRON (1962-64)

12th-14th September, Best Western Tiverton Hotel, Tiverton, Devon. Reunion dinner on

Saturday 13th September. **Contact Barry (Baz) Marshall at baz76459@gmail.com**

HMS ARIADNE

17th-19th September, Belstead Brook Hotel and Spa, Belstead Road, Ipswich. 10th reunion – all former shipmates and partners are welcome. **All bookings to be made through Dave Sprinks at dave-sprinks@hotmail.com or on 07989 435701**

HMS CLEOPATRA OLD SHIPMATES ASSOCIATION

5th-7th November, Best Western Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea. 36th AGM and reunion, including 'Up Spirits' and gala dinner. A great weekend will be had by all.

Contact Honorary Secretary Warwick Franklin for details at warwick_franklin@outlook.com

HMS BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION

New date: 21st May 2022, WO & SR's Mess, HMS Drake. 25th reunion, which will also be the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War. **Book your place at hmsbroadsword.co.uk**

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1 SQUADRON, ROYAL CORPS OF TRANSPORT/ROYAL LOGISTIC CORPS

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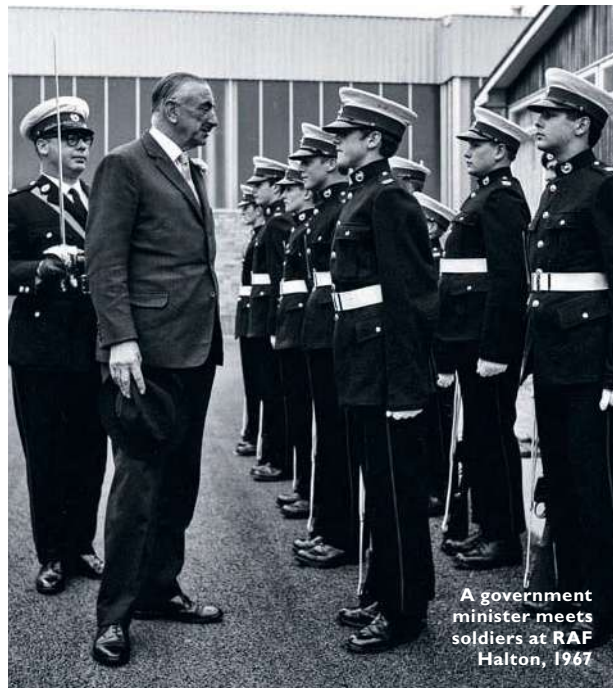
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38 SQUADRON, ROYAL CORPS OF TRANSPORT

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**Contact the
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rct38sqn@hotmail.com**

38 AMBULANCE SQUADRON, ROYAL CORPS OF TRANSPORT AND 36 COMPANY, RASC (MOTOR AMBULANCE)

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John Lewis at
jaslmlewis@aol.com**

RAF BOYS ENTRANTS 43RD ENTRY REUNION

15th-18th October, The
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Note: Image shows plant trimmed
into a standard. Colours vary.

Now's the time to tackle your smartphone

At last, using your smartphone can be easy, simple and stress-free. Find out how...

Modern mobile phones – smartphones as they're called – can do so much more than just make phone calls.

From browsing the web wherever you are, checking train times, acting as a sat-nav... And best of all they can make it so easy to keep in touch with family and friends – in so many ways, from sharing photos to making video calls.

But using them isn't always as easy as you'd want – and that's putting it mildly!

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

Sometimes it can seem like the manufacturers deliberately make them complicated – and how you do things is often hidden away. It might be easy once you know, but until you've been shown the easy way, it can drive you mad.

In fact only yesterday I was talking to someone whose Mum had got a new all-singing-all-dancing phone – but she couldn't work out how to answer a phone call on it! She's not daft – it's just that the phone didn't come with a manual telling her what to do.

Whether you have similar problems or you're trying to do something slightly more advanced, the thing is, it can be easy to use them... once you know how. But until you've been shown, it can be like talking a different language.

That's why we've published these two books: *iPhones one Step at a Time* and *Android Smartphones One Step at a Time*.

Plain English... and that's not all

They explain how to use the phone, in plain simple language with pictures of the screen showing you exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

What's covered?

I can't list it all here. But amongst other things, you'll discover:

- The basics of controlling it – swiping, tapping, opening apps & so on.



Suitable for iPhones, Android phones like Samsungs, etc., & Doros. (Not sure what phone you have? Best send off for the free infopack)

- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away.
- How to use it as a sat-nav... in the car or even on foot.
- Send emails from your phone.
- Instant messaging and how to use it.
- Most phones have a good camera built in – here's how to use it properly.
- Share photos with friends around the world – quickly and easily.
- Choosing and downloading apps.

And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. ("Voicemail" is covered, too). All explained nice and simply. (Find out more in the free infopack – read on...)

What one reader had to say:

"Thanks for a fantastic smart phone book. Very pleasant staff as usual."

"I think this book should be sold with every smart phone. I have learnt so much from it, the info you get with the phone is non-existent."

"Smart phones are quite complex, and your books speak in plain English."

Only half the story

That's only half the story, but I don't have room to explain here. I've put together full information on the books – who they're for, what they cover and so on. What's more, the books also come with a free gift – no room to explain that here either.

Don't buy now, do this instead

The books aren't available in the shops or on Amazon. Instead, send off now to get a completely free, no-obligation information pack. It'll explain what the books cover, who they're suitable for and so on.

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LOST TRAILS

Do you recognise yourself or anyone in the photos below? Get in touch



Self-defence in Scotland

Vivien Carter's father, Bill Wragg (above), was from Sheffield, and he joined the Royal Artillery in 1939. His first posting was to Dover, firing ack-ack guns. Bill finished his military service in Scotland, near Helensburgh, and Vivien was told that he may have been training agents in self-defence before they were deployed in France. "Self-defence was clearly very important to him: he taught my sister and me the rudiments... with the stern stipulation that you did not use these actions unless you were seriously provoked," she writes. If you have any information about what was happening in Scotland towards the end of the Second World War, or met Bill, Vivien would love to hear from you.

Contact: viv@maisoncarter.co.uk



60 YEARS LATER...

Alan Barry's (circled) class joined the Royal Navy 60 years ago this past January. "We were 15 years old when we joined up," writes Alan. "Our training was at HMS Ganges Class 283, Buntings, and we started on 2nd January, 1961. A few of us are still in touch but we are trying to get more to meet up." If you recognise anyone in the photo, please contact Alan.

Contact: barryaj@virginmedia.com

Looking for Bradwell veterans

Stephen Nunn (right) has spent more than 45 years researching the wartime story of RAF Bradwell Bay in Essex. He writes: "During that time, I have been truly privileged to meet, correspond with and interview a number of ex-personnel – aircrew, ground crew and others associated with this important night-fighter station on the marsh. As time has gone by, fewer and fewer of those RAF veterans are still with us. If you served at Bradwell, or know anyone who did, and would be willing to exchange an email with me, I would love to hear from you."

Contact Stephen c/o: christine7.wisterialodge@talktalk.net



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

Already found someone through Lost Trails?
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“How to beat boredom and loneliness!” Get ready for freedom with this 'go-anywhere' touch-screen tablet!

Email, chat, search, shop, watch, listen, read and more... with this 10-inch tablet you're just a wi-fi connection away from all the wonders of the world wide web!

Finally we have hope that life may return to some degree of normality. Thousands have discovered that this touch-screen tablet has offered a lifeline in lockdown they simply couldn't be without.

For those who bought it first time around, this touch-screen tablet now offers a lifeline in lockdown they simply couldn't be without. One reviewer said: "It's my new best friend – it has set me free! Now I can watch my grandkids grow up on What'sApp and talk to them face-to-face on Zoom! At first I thought I wouldn't be able to grasp the technology, but you really don't have to. If you can touch the screen with your finger, you can use this tablet...it really is that easy!"

Others explained how watching the news on BBC iPlayer kept them informed of the latest government guidelines. And, for those who want to watch without a TV licence, one tap on the Netflix button opens up a whole new

world of 24/7 entertainment, from movies to mini-series, documentaries and more.

You can even while away an afternoon playing Sudoku or doing crosswords on-screen, and there are all sorts of games designed to keep your mind active and alert. This easy-to-use tablet lets you 'surf the web' and stay connected with the outside world. Simple, jargon-free instructions help turn the fear and anxiety of getting online into a surprisingly joyful experience.

It may seem at odds with today's socially-distanced world, but keeping in touch with friends and family has never been easier. And finally when life returns to normal you'll have time to share family pictures and impress family and friends with your new found skills!

*Subscription required

Netflix app available on Portfolio Android 9 only

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WHILE STOCK LASTS

“My son bought it for me as a gift. I Skyped him to say thanks and he was so impressed! Now we talk every day and I can watch the grandkids grow up, too. A thoughtful gift that has had such a positive impact on my life.”
Janet Quinn, 63, nr Banbury

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— Super slim side view —

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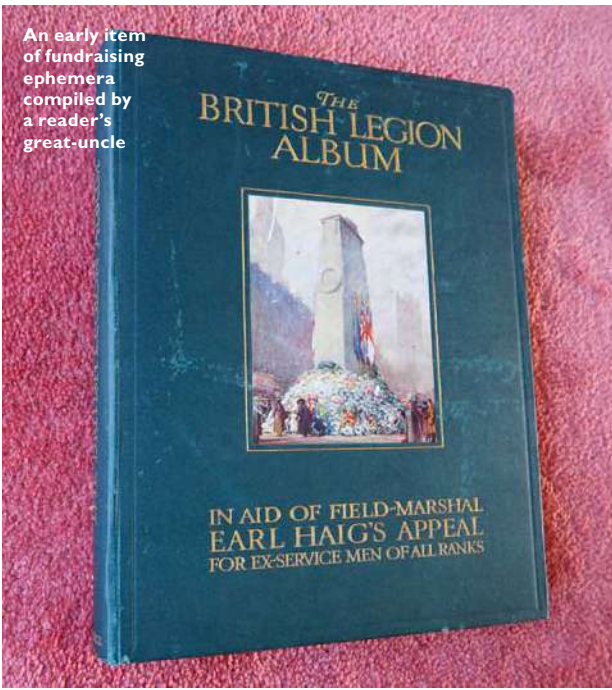
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PRESSPLAY

LETTERS

A century of fundraising, RBL campaigns and National Service



1920s FUNDRAISING

In 2011, I was researching my great-grandfather and was very surprised to discover a book compiled by my great-uncle Ernest Lonsdale Deighton. It was a large, unique autograph book with written and visual contributions from an array of people, including: royal families and European governments; composers (Vaughan Williams, Edward Elgar); famous writers (Thomas Hardy, AA Milne); the Shackleton-Rowell expedition; and the architect of the Cenotaph, Sir Edwin Lutyens. The book was called *The*

British Legion Album in Aid of Field-Marshal Earl Haig's Appeal for Ex-Service Men of All Ranks. It was commissioned by Field Marshal Earl Haig, who likely knew my great-uncle.

Even though I have various items belonging to my great-uncle, I knew nothing of this fundraising book, and I had no idea of his connection to the British Legion. After my ordination in 2006, I became a voluntary interfaith chaplain for my local branch of the Royal British Legion.

Since moving to France, I have carried on my

contribution with the Bordeaux & South-West France Branch, where I serve on the committee and lead the annual Remembrance Day service (sadly not last year, though).

I would love to know if any readers are aware of any archived information relating to this at all – maybe even a copy of the original book, which was printed in either 1923 or 1924. **Rev Akasha Lonsdale-Deighton, Lot-et-Garonne, France, by email**

STOP THE SERVICE CHARGE CAMPAIGN

Stephen Kendrick shared the following letter, which he sent to Gary Streeter MP after reading about the RBL's campaign to Stop the Service Charge in the September 2020 issue of *Legion*.

I spent over 30 years of my life serving and

occasionally defending our country. When the time came to pass on the baton, I spent another 12 years helping our new recruits. Throughout the decades, I had the privilege to serve with people recruited from the Commonwealth as we sought to make up the shortages of UK recruits. Without exception, these men and women served honourably and with the same commitment and dedication as their British comrades. Many risked their lives and life-changing injuries, and many witnessed terrible and terrifying events. They earned a place at our table.

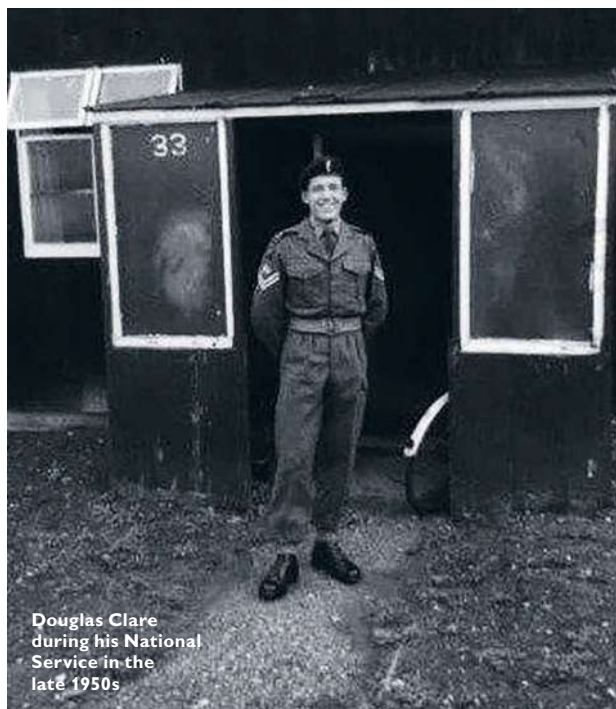
Once they were ready to return to civilian life, the same politicians who sent them to fight their wars let them down. The Government demands thousands of pounds from them for the right to be



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Douglas Clare during his National Service in the late 1950s

my trusty Triumph Speed Twin. I passed out, just, and was sent to 35 Base Workshops at Old Dalby, which to me sounded like a rest home for old horses. I was given more training and put to work on the RA's Corporal missile system.

It was a good experience and I made friends with guys from all over Britain. It served as a breathing space, before I made a career in engineering management. **Ex-Corporal Doug Clare, Bampton, by email**

FAMILY FEELING

I've been looking at photos in *Legion* of people who joined the Armed Forces in 1964/65, the same year I joined the Army. I could see myself in all those photos. I didn't know it then, but I'd become a member of a rather exclusive family. It doesn't seem to matter which regiment or branch of the Armed Forces we joined; we all had our pride in the uniform we wore.

As a veteran, I enjoy being part of that family. We can talk about our service years, happy and sad, and understand each other. I can remember when I was 17, in my first year of service, being scared of anyone with a rank higher than Corporal. It's the greatest feeling to meet other veterans, to feel safe in their company. My RBL lapel pin says, "Come and say Hi, let's talk."

Dennis Gimes, London, by email

MEMORIES OF NATIONAL SERVICE

David Norris's experiences (February issue) reminded me of my two years as an NS REME Radar Mechanic. I was ending my apprenticeship as an Instrument Maker and, on reaching 21, I had deliberately held back my deferment papers, looking forward to conscription. In September 1958, I was sent for basic training at Blandford and, like David, I was selected for training as a Radar Mechanic, despite my electrical knowledge being limited to fixing a plug on a lead.

Training was at Arborfield, and the course was challenging, but I could get home most weekends on

citizens of the country they have served and sworn to defend. My comrades deserve better. Little use calling them heroes and veterans, laying wreaths to their fallen, if they are to be treated in this way. I firmly believe that my comrades should, on receiving an honourable discharge, automatically be granted UK citizenship in recognition of what they have done for our country. Thank you.

SN Kendrick, Plymouth, by email

Mr Streeter responded to Mr Kendrick that he would look into the matter. If you'd like to contact your MP about Stop the Service Charge, visit rbl.org.uk/stoptheservicecharge for more information.



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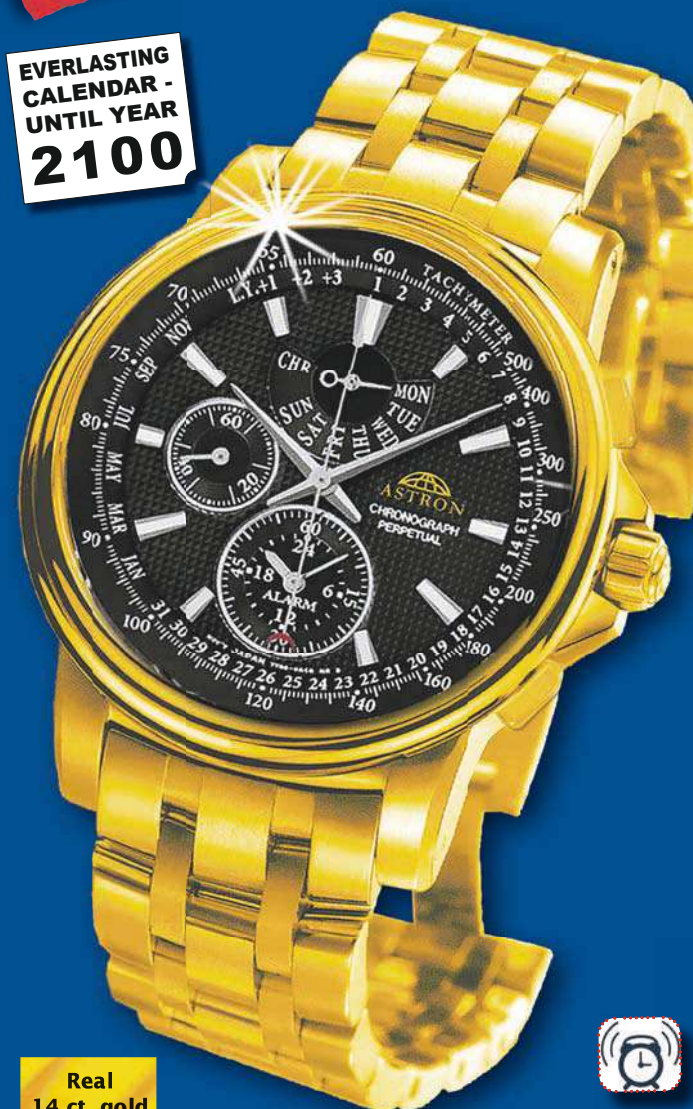


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For over 70 years, the NHS has looked after the health and well-being of our nation.

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"The Bear Who Cares" wears the "national" – the uniform created for nurses when the NHS first came into being in 1948. How professional and capable she looks in her calf-length blue dress, crisp white apron and starched white cap. The bear is full of character, with a kind-hearted twinkle in those cute boot-button eyes.

The pin attached to her apron typically identified the school of nursing from which she graduated. Here it depicts a nurse tenderly caring for a patient with a broken arm.

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"THE BEAR WHO CARES" by Steiff

Please reserve _____ (q'ty) "The Bear Who Cares" for me, as described in this offer. My satisfaction is guaranteed.

☐ Please charge my credit/debit card in monthly instalments.

Card No. ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa/Delta

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Card expiry date _____ Signature _____

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We'll invoice you for the first instalment.

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We may process your information and share it with carefully considered companies to enhance the services we provide. For more information see our Privacy Notice at www.danburymint.co.uk.

OFFER CODE:
H14018

Actual size of bear
is 9½" (25cm) standing.



Affordable and convenient monthly instalments.

"The Bear Who Cares" can be yours for five convenient monthly instalments of £39.80 (plus £1.50 postage and handling per instalment) – a total of £199 (plus £7.50 p&h). If you are not completely satisfied, simply return her within 90 days for a FULL refund – including our postage and handling charge!

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