



**Veterans & Families – Listening Project**

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# Welcome to our June 2023 Newsletter

Once upon a time, ten years ago... We decided to open up a drop-in for the Veterans & Families of our Armed Forces; and run the drop-in for one year. Back in the day, we were known as Surrey Heath Veterans & Families – Listening Project (SHV&F-LP), and later on as THE outstanding V&F-LP.

V&F-LP has provided guidance, and mentored many veterans' drop-ins, served on steering committees, as well as participated in forums to promote awareness of the challenges facing veterans and their families.

We would like to say a huge, BIG, M.A.S.S.I.V.E. Thank you to all the Veterans & Families that we have had the pleasure to meet, and get to know. As well as all the

Government Departments, agencies, charities and support groups that too.

V&F-LP have decided that for the foreseeable future, we will not be re-opening. However, we will continue with our marvellous, monthly newsletter... YAY...

# Hot Topics

We're back so grab a snack it's time for...

## FEMALE VETS SUPPORT BID

■ A STUDY into support for female ex-Forces personnel is set to be published soon amid concerns that some leavers might be missing out on help.

The research will include a series of recommendations to underpin a new Women Veterans' Strategy later this year.

Defence chiefs have voiced concern that Servicewomen hanging up their boots might not be receiving the same levels of assistance as their male counterparts.

Armed Forces Minister Johnny Mercer said it was "vital" that female personnel had the help they needed after making the transition to civvy street.

The MP and ex-Royal Artillery officer said areas such as mental health, physical welfare and civilian employment would come under scrutiny.

Several charities have called for researchers to embrace a broad remit, indicating that the effects of musculoskeletal injuries on female veterans should be included on their agenda.

Meanwhile, the Call of Duty Endowment – a cause run by American gaming firm Activision Blizzard – has confirmed that it is working with Brit colleagues to help more female veterans into civvy employment.



## BLOOD BREAKTHROUGH

FRONT-LINE medical personnel will soon have a lifesaving product in their toolkit to help treat the most seriously injured soldiers.

Defence chiefs have confirmed that a £4.9 million project to produce dried plasma – which helps blood to clot – will cut the time it takes to treat severe trauma.

There are also hopes that the so-called Blood Far Forward initiative could have knock-on benefits for civilian ambulance crews on the home front in future.

Consultant anaesthetist Lt Col Oli Bartels (RAMC), a veteran of Op Herrick, described the initiative as a “significant development”.

He pointed out that plasma must commonly be frozen to keep it in optimal condition – meaning that it has to be stowed in cold stores en route to operations. But the new product could be kept at room temperature for easy transportation.

While the UK sometimes sourced



Picture: Graeme Main

dried plasma from Nato allies, a home production line would make it more readily available.

The officer told *Soldier*: “If you need a product to be frozen in the first instance, then you clearly have more of an issue when you’re moving it around. Cutting out the requirement for freezers makes the process easier and ultimately means we can shift the plasma further forward.”

“In the future we may also use drones to deliver these products.”

The three-year plasma project is being overseen by Surgeon General Maj Gen Tim Hodgetts and conducted by NHS Blood and Transplant with technical support from American health giant Velico.

The initiative is being spearheaded by a number of UK clinical trials.



“Dad, the team feels your feeding leadership is lacking.”



## RUSHMOOR COMMUNITY IN BLOOM

'WILD ABOUT GARDENING'

THIS YEAR'S CATEGORIES INCLUDE:



Best Wildlife Friendly Garden



Best Front Garden



Best Community Garden



Most Unusual Planted Container



For further information visit  
<https://www.rvs.org.uk/rushmoor-community-in-bloom/>  
 or call 01252 398450



Charity No. 1059794



King Edward VII's Hospital (KEVII) was set up to provide healthcare to veterans in 1899. In 2015 The Centre for Veterans' Health (CVH) was established. Whilst the hospital has grown and evolved significantly since then veterans' healthcare remains central to all they do. CVH currently has three core pillars of activity:

- The Pain Management Programme (PMP), this award-winning free programme exists to help veterans to manage acute and chronic pain, ensuring they can live their lives to the fullest
- 100% means-tested grants for medical treatment
- 20% discount for all current and ex serving member of the armed forces, and their families

For more information, please visit their website:  
[About The Charity | King Edward VII's Hospital](#)





Mission Motorsport have a Karting event on at TeamSport Farnborough, Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June. Currently have spaces available, and wondered if you had any members of the Armed Forces community that would like to attend?

The event is open to all member of the community, Veteran, currently serving, carers and family at no cost to participate in the Karting.

They use the adult Karts so drivers racing in the adult karts must have an inside leg measurement (measured from the crotch to the base of the heel, whilst wearing shoes) of 29 inches or more. If you have any more queries, please visit TeamSport FAQ page:

**[www.team-sport.co.uk/go-karting-faqs](http://www.team-sport.co.uk/go-karting-faqs)**

More details and booking can be found at the link through their website:

**Veterans Karting Championship — MISSION  
MOTORSPORT**

Email: [team@missionmotorsport.org](mailto:team@missionmotorsport.org) Tel: 03330 338338

■ IT isn't what you think; the soldier from the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment is actually "laying down" his horse – a battle tactic of old, used to conceal and protect cavalry units from enemy gunfire. The routine was part of the Musical Ride, the impressive annual display at the Royal Windsor Horse Show, where soldiers from The Life Guards and The Blues and Royals perform, to music, a series of stunning manoeuvres used by the regiment in the days when it still fought on horseback.



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd; RLC

[news@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:news@soldiermagazine.co.uk)

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Pictures: Shutterstock

## CANINE THERAPY



A CHARITY that promotes canine assisted therapy is offering its services to Army units. Warminster-based Dogs for Health works with the elderly and those in care with the aim of promoting well-being by reducing stress, social isolation and anxiety. The team is now looking to visit military bases across the south to help boost troops' mental health. To organise an event or for more details contact [info@dogsforhealth.org.uk](mailto:info@dogsforhealth.org.uk)

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"I want to look like this."



## UPGRADE OF DEFENCE FIRE ENGINE FLEET COMPLETE

■ A £90 MILLION transformation programme of Defence Fire and Rescue's firefighting fleet has finished. A total of 138 state-of-the-art vehicles were bought under the project to replace ageing platforms at stations across the MoD estate. The scheme also included the refurbishment of ten existing fire engines. The move has brought several benefits including improved safety – with personnel now having the ability to fight fires from within the cab of their appliance – and lower fuel consumption, as well as reduced smoke and CO2 emissions.

## DISCOUNT FIRM DONATION

■ ARMED Forces charities are poised to benefit from a huge cash windfall from the Defence Discount Service.

Bosses at the organisation, which offers a £4.99 card that unlocks savings at shops, restaurants and other venues, said £270,000 had been handed over to help the military community in the past 12 months.

The outfit has been donating a percentage of revenue raised to charities since its launch just over a decade ago.

A number of good causes – including the Army Welfare Service – will benefit from the latest donation.

Defence Discount Service chief exec Tom Dalby said: "We are thrilled to be able to support these important initiatives."

Visit [defencediscountservice.co.uk](https://defencediscountservice.co.uk) for more information.



# The soldier's return

How a Falklands War artefact led to a mission of reconciliation

▶ **MARK Eyles-Thomas** was a teenager when he joined 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment shortly before Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982.

But he could never have foreseen how the chance acquisition of a helmet worn by an enemy combatant would bring him full circle some 40 years later.

**I** WAS just 17 years old when I fought during Op Corporate in the South Atlantic.

So in 2022, when I had the chance to meet some of the combatants we faced all those years ago, there were many conflicting emotions on the 14-hour flight to Argentina.

There was a bizarre reason for the trip – a military helmet.

It had belonged to a man I had never met, who had fought on the opposite side of the war. And I was taking it 7,000 miles back to his country.

This all started well over a decade ago, when I had written a book about my experiences in the 1982 conflict, including the Battle for Mount Longdon.

I held a signing event for the launch and set out a table with some of my

memorabilia from the era.

But it was then that a visitor came by and said that I was “missing an object from the other side”. He went out and returned to leave a helmet, before disappearing in short order.

The kit was clearly Argentine but I paid little attention at the time. I packed it up – and it was only after recently finding it in some personal effects that I took a closer look and noticed the name ‘Sirtori’ on the lining.

With my curiosity piqued I asked a friend – who is also a historian – for assistance. He noted that the helmet cover was of a type worn by the Argentine marines.

But I wanted to know about the owner – and further research uncovered details of a Daniel Sirtori who had seen action against 2nd Battalion, Scots Guards at

Mount Tumbledown on the last day of the war.

Although he survived the battle, the conscript – from the Tierra del Fuego-based 5th Marine Infantry Battalion – sadly took his own life in 1999.

However, with assistance from a military researcher in Argentina, I managed to establish contact with Daniel's daughter Virginia and her partner Carlos.

We chatted online and I began thinking about how I could return her father's helmet – particularly as the couple had founded a museum about the war in their home city of Chajari.

I didn't want to send it through the postal system – and I had concerns about taking it on board a commercial flight with all the related security.

But then the nation's UK ambassador Javier Figueroa stepped in, kindly arranging to have the helmet sent via

diplomatic channels.

My wife Tricia and I were on our way to Argentina soon after, having been invited to present it at a ceremony hosted by Virginia and Carlos.

Meeting Daniel's family was emotional. Above all, the warmth of everyone struck me. I sat down with several Argentine veterans – including retired lieutenant colonel Carlos Carrizo Salvadores, who had commanded the forces the paras had fought at Longdon.

Since my visit I have made many new friends, and Virginia, Carlos and I message each other regularly on WhatsApp.

Getting to know them has helped me recognise that the people I faced in the Falklands were young men, like me, who were fighting for their country.

I am so glad that it was in the spirit of peace and reconciliation that I made another, life-changing journey across the South Atlantic. ■



[news@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:news@soldiermagazine.co.uk)



## MY EXPERIENCES AS A PRACTISING MUSLIM IN THE ROYAL NAVY

📅 15 June 2023 | 🕒 Time: 13:30

Events

A chance to hear about the experiences of Leading Chef Khan who has served for 22 years in the Royal Navy.

Followed by a Q&A session.

Book your place now!

[REGISTER NOW >](#)

[REGISTER NOW >](#)



# BRITANNIA ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE OPEN DAY

📅 15 July - 06 June 2023 | 🕒 Time: 10:00 |

📍 Britannia Royal Naval College Open Day

Fees: Free | Top Stories

For the first time since 2019, we will be welcoming the public through our gates and proudly displaying the best of Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC) Dartmouth and naval training.

Dartmouth has been the home of Royal Navy Officer training since 1863 and we continue to share a close and special bond with the town, local area and wider Royal Navy. By opening our doors to the public, we hope to strengthen these ties, continue to build upon our shared interests and thank the local community for their continued support.

We will host a wide variety of local businesses, groups, charities and organisations, as well as various affiliated Naval parties, in order to not only proudly display what we do, but also to thank the community and organisations that help us do it.

Food and refreshments will be available, provided by our own suppliers, ESS, and local businesses, along with entertainment for all ages.

We will be showcasing our world-leading facilities and training, both of which ensure that the Royal Navy remains a cutting-edge force for good.

Above all else it will be an opportunity to meet the staff and officer cadets, that live, work and train here; making BRNC what it is today.

We look forward to seeing you!

[GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY! >](#)



[GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY! >](#)



# ROYAL NAVY DIVERS LOOK AT LIFE COURSE

02 - 03 August 2023

HMS Sultan

Royal Navy Clearance Divers Look at Life Courses allow you to learn more about life in the Royal Navy.

Join us on 2 - 3 August.

Royal Navy Engineering and Clearance Divers Look at Life Courses take place at HMS SULTAN in Hampshire with the Royal Navy, with various visits to other areas depending on which course you attend.

Each course is designed to introduce and educate you if you're looking to join Royal Navy Engineers and Divers, demonstrating the varied roles and responsibilities.

You will also have the opportunity to meet with serving personnel who will be able to give you their lived experience of being an Engineer or Diver in operational, training and peace time roles.

Just some of the activities you will participate in are:

## Divers

- Defence Diving School visit, with presentation and subject matter expert tour
- Visibility of a bomb disposal experts equipment, an understanding on how they operate and face to face discussion of what they do
- And much more

Upcoming dates: 2 - 3 Aug 2023, 27 - 28 Sep 2023, 15 - 16 Nov 2023 (tbc).

## Engineers

- Marine, Air and Weapon Engineering School visits, with presentation and subject matter expert guided tour
- HM Ship visit and dockside tour
- Various face to face discussions providing you with an excellent opportunity to ask questions

Upcoming dates: 31 Jul - 2 Aug 2023; 25 Sep - 27 Sep 2023, 13 Nov - 15 Nov 2023 (tbc).

## Want to get in touch?

Find the contacts you need for recruitment, media enquiries and more.

[CONTACT US >](#)



## Follow us today on:



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[www.facebook.com/VeteransnFamiliesListeningProject](http://www.facebook.com/VeteransnFamiliesListeningProject)



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[www.vflp.org.uk](http://www.vflp.org.uk)

V&F-LP is an independent member of ASDIC.  
 The association of Ex-Service Drop-in Centres,  
 Linking Veterans' Drop-ins together across the  
 United Kingdom.





Dutch Marines wear their green berets on the completion of their All-Arms Commando Course

Pictures by: LPhoto Barry Swainsbury

# PAIN AND PRIDE

## DUTCH MARINES EARN THEIR GREEN BERETS

SIX Dutch Marines were presented with coveted Green Berets at the end of the infamous yomp across Dartmoor.

The '30 miler' – a march of eight hours or under across the moor in full fighting order and carrying kit in their Bergen rucksacks – is the final test of the All-Arms Commando Course, which must be completed to earn the coveted icon of cloak-and-dagger warfare.

As part of 50th anniversary celebrations of the UK and Netherlands Amphibious Force (UKNLAF), Lieutenant Colonel Oscar van der Veen of the Netherlands Marines Corps presented his countrymen and their fellow newly-qualified commandos with their green berets.

The two Marine Corps – and the Royal Navy and Royal Netherlands Navy – have deep ties which are embodied by the joint amphibious force, which was formed in 1973 and is Europe's oldest integrated force.

Joint training, shared values and equipment are all part of the UKNLAF – including a long history of Dutch Marines taking on the 13-week All-Arms Commando Course.

"It was 23 years ago when I was awarded my Green Beret," said Lt Col van der Veen.

"But the moment is the same for these young Marines, you can see it in their eyes, you can see the pain but also the pride they have for their achievements.

"It is humbling to look back on some of the images of what it was like 50 years ago when the UKNLAF was created.

"We had a Dutch Marines company integrated with Whisky Company, 45 Commando in Scotland. It was impressive to see what they were able to achieve alongside the Royal Marines.

"They trained and operated in the mountains, in Norway, in Arctic conditions and wherever the British went, they

were true pioneers for us.

"We are now a modern, fully-integrated and capable amphibious force, able to face all the new challenges that the world has to offer.

"The current series of exercises has seen Dutch and British Marines working ever closer together, we look at each other, we talk the same language always and know exactly what each other can do; we can trust each other."

"That bond goes even further back than the past 50 years, Dutch Commandos and Royal Marines fought side-by-side at Gibraltar in 1704, and during World War 2, when the Commandos were formed, there was a Dutch Troop No 2, as part of No 10 Commando.

"After WW2, Dutch Troop No 2 evolved into what is now Dutch Army Special Operations Forces (SOF).

"We have a long-distinguished and proud history together and we send people back to the Commando School at Lympstone on a very regular basis, you can't beat the original."

Lt Col Karl Johnston, Officer Commanding the Commando Training Wing at the Commando Training Centre in Lympstone, addressed those who had just completed the final test.

He said: "This year marks the 50th anniversary of the UKNLAF, Europe's oldest integrated military force. It is a real privilege to welcome you all to a special club – arguably the most exclusive and yet inclusive club in defence.

"Exclusive because the only entry point is passing those standards that you have all achieved, nobody gets the Green Beret without completing the professional and physical standards that we demand. But inclusive because clearly, we will welcome anyone with open arms if they can pass the Commando Tests."

# PAIN AND PRIDE

DUTCH MARINES EARN THEIR **GREEN BERETS**



The men are clapped in as they approach the end of the 30 miler



Lt Col Oscar van der Veen presents his countrymen with their green berets

REF: NAVAL NEWS MAY 2023 MAY 2023 : 13



# NAVY NEWS

MAY 2023

# THE PAST MEETS #NEXT GEN RAF AT RAF CRANWELL



RAF Cranwell, 1921  
CENTRAL FLYING SCHOOL.  
FOURTH FLYING INSTRUCTORS' COURSE—146 MARCH TO 156 JUNE, 1921.

**Congratulations to Pilot Officer Insall who graduated from the RAF Officer Training Academy at RAF Cranwell, watched by her family and friends.**

Pilot Officer Insall graduation marks 108 years of military history for the Insall family.

It was during the Modular Initial Officer Training Course that Pilot Officer Insall rediscovered that one of her ancestors served in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War.

Gilbert Stuart Martin Insall commissioned in the Royal Flying Corps on 14 March 1915, and at just 21 years of age and only seven months into his career was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC). Insall was unable to personally receive his VC in 1915, as he and his gunner had fallen wounded into captivity. After 2 years and two failed attempts to escape, Insall escaped on his third attempt and arrived home in 1917. His VC was presented by His Majesty the King (George V) on 27 September 1917.

After the war, Insall remained in service, receiving a permanent commission as a Captain in the newly formed Royal Air Force on 1 Aug 1919 – his rank was re-graded to Flight Lieutenant on the same day. Just 3 months later, Insall was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for gallantry after escaping from captivity as a Prisoner of War during the War. In 1920, he undertook No 4 Flying Instructors Course at the Central Flying School (CFS) at RAF Upavon.

To further explore her family legacy, Pilot Officer Insall met

with the Commandant of the CFS prior to her graduation to learn about her great-great uncle and to understand the Flying Instructors Course.

Group Captain Jordan was able to show Pilot Officer Insall photo of her ancestor's graduation from No 4 Flying Instructors Course in 1920 and helped her to understand CFS' amazing history but also, its relevance in today's RAF.

**Pilot Officer Insall said:** "Whilst at RAF Cranwell, I have re-discovered just how interesting a history my family has in the RAF. My great-great uncle, Group Captain G S M Insall, was awarded a VC for his actions during the First World War. To be continuing my family's legacy in the RAF makes me proud and I'm looking forward to my future career."

"The opportunity to see Gilbert's course photo in HQ CFS was really special, and it is nice to know that my family history lives on within the RAF for me to build on. The interest shown by Commandant CFS about preserving the past was encouraging and I appreciated the parallels he drew about their past innovation to the current day."

**Group Captain Jordan, Commandant CFS said:** "It was a genuine delight meeting with Pilot Officer Insall and to discuss her great-great-uncle's illustrious military career, including his time as a CFS qualified instructor. The story of his exploits, which led to the award of both VC and MC, reminded me of the innovative spirit that the founding Fathers of our Service and the CFS exemplified. Whilst the technology that we operate might have changed since 1915, the ethos remains, and we should be extremely proud of our heritage and legacy. The CFS wish Pilot officer Insall the very best of luck in her future career".



# ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR VETERANS SURVEY FINDINGS

## Background

From November 1<sup>st</sup> 2022, to February 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, the APPG for Veterans ran a short survey to investigate the experiences UK veterans and personnel have with claiming compensation through the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) or War Pensions.

The survey received **1,040** responses overall.

Not all questions were answered by all respondents. This is partly because respondents were guided down different pathways of the survey depending on whether their application was successful, and whether they launched an appeal. This is also partly because questions were optional.

All respondents gave consent to their responses being viewed, stored, and published by the APPG. Responses were anonymous by default, unless veterans chose to add identifying features to their comments on open questions.



## Headline Statistics

- **76.4%** veterans and personnel would rate their overall experience claiming compensation through Veterans UK as poor, or very poor – compared to just **6.4%** as good or very good.
- **83.4%** veterans and personnel would rate the level of support they felt during the process of claiming compensation as poor, or very poor – compared to just **5.9%** as good or very good.
- **77%** veterans and personnel would rate the level of communication they received whilst awaiting the results of their application for compensation as poor, or very poor – compared to just **6.5%** as good or very good.
- **84.5%** veterans and personnel would rate the consideration given by Veterans UK to their mental (and/or) physical health whilst making their claim as poor, or very poor – compared to just **5.7%** as good or very good.

## Headline Quotes

- “The process had broken me mentally to the point where my choice was walk away or commit suicide.”
- “Veterans UK make it so difficult for all veterans and you feel like a criminal, there’s no compassion whatsoever.”
- “My dealings with this organisation would lead me to believe it is set up to cause deliberate harm to veterans – it is a disgrace.”
- “I have been homeless, jobless and struggled for many years with PTSD but Veterans UK ignore, obfuscate, delay and deny for as long as they can.”



# Forces Pension Society: can you help identify a Veteran with an unclaimed pension?



# A

s part of a campaign to encourage Veterans with unclaimed pension benefits to come forward with their claims, the Forces Pension Society encourages you to help identify anyone you think might qualify. We know there are thousands of Veterans who have not yet made their claims. Our recent Freedom of Information request showed that during the 24-month period alone, between 1st June 2020 – 31st May 2022, over 4,000 Armed Forces pensions went unclaimed.

The AFPS Annual Report (July 2022) identified a larger total of 16,518 unclaimed benefits, with some Veterans having more than one entitlement.

**Maj Gen Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society** said:

“We can all play our part in encouraging Veterans we know, to come forward if they have not claimed their preserved pensions or preserved lump sums. These can be significant amounts of money. For example, a preserved pension of £1,500 for someone who left in April 1985, would now have a value of £4,500 pa.

Anyone serving after April 1975, now aged 60 or over, could have an unclaimed pension. AFPS pensions earned before April 2005 are payable at age 60 but will not be paid automatically – they have to be applied for.

“We urge you to encourage anyone who might be eligible, to visit the Veterans’ Gateway website without delay:

[www.bit.ly/3o59T4f](http://www.bit.ly/3o59T4f)

“Of course the Government also has a role to play in signposting the issue to the Veterans’ community, and we continue to encourage them to do just that.”

The Forces Pension Society is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that acts as a pension watchdog for the entire military community. If you would like to find out more about our work and how we empower our Members to make the best pension choices, visit our website –

[www.forcespensionsociety.org](http://www.forcespensionsociety.org)



Maj Gen Neil Marshall, CEO, FPS



*“Let me chase the squirrels from now on.”*

# New separation and divorce guide for military personnel spouses and partners

Ending a marriage or long-term relationship is usually stressful and emotional and there are often added complexities to consider if you are part of the Armed Forces Family. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to ensuring that spouses, partners and families of Military personnel have access to the support they need throughout this journey.

There is a vast amount of information already available, but this can also be overwhelming and hard to find when it's not all in one place. This new comprehensive online guide should help to alleviate some of that pressure and uncertainty.

There are also likely to be additional issues to consider that civilian couples and families don't have to face, such as eligibility to allowances, and entitlement to Service Family Accommodation (SFA). The information contained in this guide seeks to address some of those nuances for you.

This guide is not a replacement to the wide range of

organisations that are on hand to assist, but an online resource containing guidance, information and links to the various organisations and support networks available to you.

Whether you are a spouse or partner who is separating from a member of the Armed Forces, or an individual supporting someone who is, these resources have proven helpful to others who have been through similar experiences and it is hoped that you will find them useful too.

To access the guide head to:

<https://bit.ly/separation-and-divorce-guide>



*"Parks and Wildlife called—I thought you should know."*

# GETTING BACK ON TRACK

When former RAF technician Matt struggled to find the right support when he suffered a stroke aged 44, the RAF Association stepped in to help him get his dignity back.

Although a serious skiing accident put an end to Matt's career in the RAF, he was forging a new path for himself working as a contractor for various organisations, including the MOD. He was also in the process of renovating his house, which he shares with wife Sarah and their two daughters (pictured).

A few weeks before Christmas 2021, Matt was six weeks into a new job when he felt quite unwell. Assuming it was flu, he didn't give it much more thought. However, the next day, Matt found he was gradually becoming more unsteady on his feet. It was when he couldn't raise his arms above his head, that Sarah suggested they call 111. They were advised to go the hospital immediately.

After a long wait in A&E, it was discovered that Matt had suffered a stroke. He found himself on a ward, where the damage caused by his stroke began to take hold. He lost the use of his left arm and leg, and his face began to droop on his left side.

Because the damage had already been done, there was little

hospital staff could do. To make matters worse, the lockdown meant Matt couldn't have visitors, so he was alone.

"It was a bit of a roller coaster - I was really upset and my emotions were going mad. I couldn't look at a picture of my kids without ending up in floods of tears. I actually did my last



will and testament on my phone because I didn't think I would be able to write it. And I did a video to my kids to say goodbye. I really thought I was going to die."

Thankfully Matt regained the use of his leg, and although he had lost the use of his left arm, he was well enough to go home and spend Christmas with his family.

Matt's worries turned to the family home, which he was in the middle of renovating. With the main bathroom being upstairs, Matt struggled to access it following his stroke. He was also determined to be as independent as possible.

"The downstairs bathroom was just a big hole in the corner of the house. Having to go upstairs to use the loo wasn't ideal. I'm also stubborn, fierce and proud about that stuff. I didn't want to be helped getting to the bathroom or anything like that."



After struggling to find appropriate support, one of Matt's friends suggested the RAF Association might be able to help him make things better at home. The Association was able to secure funding through the RAF Benevolent Fund for Matt to finish the downstairs bathroom, making everyday activities much easier for him.

"Now I've got my own bathroom space. It's been modified to be practical for me to use without help. It's set up for me, so it's great. I'm going to get my RAF memorabilia on the wall once I get it framed – Sarah won't let me have a golden toilet seat though!"

Matt was also able to secure further funding to adapt his car so he could drive it using just his right arm. This has allowed him to gradually return to work and get his life back on track.

"When something like this happens, you need a lifeline. And that's where the Association came in and helped me. The progress I've made so far wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been able to get my car adapted or to get the bathroom sorted. I wouldn't be back at work in the way I am now. I wouldn't be in such a good place - I would still be struggling.

"I'm just massively grateful across the board to everybody at the Association who helped me. They were really attentive, they listened to what I was saying, and we were able to work together to achieve a fantastic outcome."

[www.rafa.org.uk](http://www.rafa.org.uk)

SUMMER 2023 |  
[raf-ff.org.uk](http://raf-ff.org.uk)

**ENVOY**

## Cost of living crisis

The cost of living crisis is making life really hard for so many members of the RAF community. Help us to deploy more caseworkers to reach thousands of veterans battling cold, hunger and loneliness.

Get help now

Continue to [rafa.org.uk](http://rafa.org.uk)





**VETERANS'**  
GATEWAY



Email us



Call 0808 802 1212



Text 81212

## Unclaimed Service Pensions

If you served in the Armed Forces from 1 April 1975 and left without entitlement to immediate benefits you could have an unclaimed pension.

To receive the pension *you need to make a claim:*

- To claim a preserved pension visit the Veterans UK website and fill in [AFPS Form 8](#)
- Send the form 3 months before your pension is due.
- If you have passed the due date, you can still claim using the same form.

## Who can help?

For information about preserved pensions, contact:

**Veterans UK**

**Telephone:** 0800 085 3600 or +44 141 224 3600 if calling from overseas

**Email:** [dbs-pensionshelp@dbspv.mod.uk](mailto:dbs-pensionshelp@dbspv.mod.uk)

**By post:**

Veterans UK,  
Pensions Division,  
Mail Point 480,  
Kentigern House,  
65 Brown Street,  
Glasgow G2 8EX

## Who else can help?

The [Forces Pension Society](#) empowers its members to make better, well-informed choices about their Armed Forces Pension. The Society is an Information Organisation on Veterans' Gateway.

[Find out about guidance from The Forces Pension Society.](#)

## Veterans' Gateway – information and support for veterans and their families

We are the first point of contact for you and your loved ones. Contact us 24/7 for help across housing, mental wellbeing, finances and more. And we can also refer you directly to our Referral Partners. Get in touch with our friendly helpline team by phone, chat, text and email.

[Explore Self help >](#)

## Connections for Life

### Are you feeling lonely or isolated?

You don't need to face life on your own. Our RAF Association Connections for Life service will pair you with a friendly volunteer who will keep in contact with regular calls.

If you think the Connections for Life service could support you, get in touch with us on **0800 018 2361** or email [friend@rafa.org.uk](mailto:friend@rafa.org.uk).



# Massed Bands' first UK tour

FOLLOWING their sell out performances at London's Royal Albert Hall in March 2023, the Massed Bands of His Majesty's Royal Marines are embarking on their first UK tour in September 2023.

With more than 100 musicians on stage and the world-famous Royal Marines Corps of Drums, these concerts showcase the outstanding musicianship and versatility of the world's finest military musicians.

Complete with special lighting effects, the spectacular concerts will also give audiences the opportunity to enjoy the traditional Naval Sunset finale.

- Thursday September 14: St David's Hall, Cardiff
- Friday 15: Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham
- Saturday 16: Bridgewater Hall, Manchester
- Thursday 28: De Montfont Hall, Leicester
- Friday 29: Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool
- Saturday 30: The Sage, Gateshead

For more details, see [www.royalmarinesbands.co.uk/events](http://www.royalmarinesbands.co.uk/events)

# £84k boost for LGBT+ veterans

FIGHTING With Pride, the charity which represents LGBT+ veterans, has been given an £84k grant to broaden its work with and network of employers and organisations who welcome and support former service personnel.

The cash from the Forces in Mind Trust will pay for a two-year programme to help business/organisations adopt the Pride in Veterans Standard (PiVS), developing inclusion and equality of treatment for LGBT+ veterans.

The standard is available to any organisation which provides veteran services or delivers veteran support and wants to demonstrate a commitment to providing an inclusive and welcoming service to LGBT+ veterans, Service personnel and their families.

Among the 30 or so institutions already approved – by demonstrating their understanding of the experiences of LGBT+ veterans, and how this impacts them when they access support – are Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue and Guy's & St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust

If you are interested in finding out more about the PiVS programme or how your organisation can support LGBT+ veterans, contact [info@fightingwithpride.org.uk](mailto:info@fightingwithpride.org.uk).

30 : MAY 2023



## Follow us today on:



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[www.facebook.com/VeteransnFamiliesListeningProject](https://www.facebook.com/VeteransnFamiliesListeningProject)



@VnF\_LP



V&F-LP is an independent member of ASDIC. The association of Ex-Service Drop-in Centres, Linking Veterans' Drop-ins together across the United Kingdom.





**Captain Tim Davey, Collingwood's CO, drops in on veterans and their assistants from Project 71 enjoying nibbles with today's sailors**

Picture: Keith Woodland, HMS Collingwood

# A taste of today's Navy for veterans

SAILORS at HMS Collingwood hosted two groups of veterans keen to learn how the Navy of 2023 trains and prepares its men and women for front-line duties.

The Fareham establishment's Victory Squadron welcomed visitors from Project 71, a South Coast support group for World War 2 veterans, who came with their helpers.

Joining them were former serving personnel spending their twilight years at Tudor Lodge care home next to Collingwood. Regularly visited by personnel from the squadron, this time the serving sailors decided to turn the tables and invite the residents into their home.

All were treated to refreshments and a light lunch in Warrant Officers' and Senior Rates' Mess as the Victory Squadron sailors mingled with the veterans and were keen to hear their stories

and experiences of their wartime service.

Ninety-eight-year-old Jean Taylor and Poppy Sherman, aged 94, spent some time chatting with AB Francesca Lambert, 18.

Jean joined the Navy at the age of 17½ and was very keen to hear how life in the RN is now. She said "I was employed as a steward in the officers' mess during my three years, I absolutely loved it.

"It is so lovely to see that they are still wearing the same uniforms as back then. It is a joy to see them and a joy to be here."

Former Commander and Weapon Engineering Officer Brian Welch is now a resident at Tudor Lodge and was delighted to return to his alma mater. Having served at HMS Collingwood many times during his career, he was hosted by ABs Liam Cockrane and Ellen Mossman.



# Study for a degree for free at OU

THERE are 50 places available for injured or disabled former sailors and Royal Marines to study with the Open University this autumn.

The Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund provides free education for personnel injured or disabled while serving.

Successful applicants will receive full fee waivers for 120 credits per year and up to 360 credits in total – equivalent to a full honour's degree.

It is deliberately flexible, and can be applied across undergraduate and post-graduate study, including access modules – the OU's short introductory courses.

Students will also have access to an expert team of specialist advisors who can help with disability and careers support.


Applications should be made before midnight on July 5 via [www.open.ac.uk/courses/fees-and-funding/disabled-veterans-scholarship-fund](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/fees-and-funding/disabled-veterans-scholarship-fund)



*"All units—we've got about half a revolting panini at the northeast corner of Bleecker and Tenth."*



# Atos wiped out in PIP bidding war

 PUBLISHED: 30 MAY 2023

Atos has either not bid for, or has failed to win, a single contract for the new combined PIP and work capability (WCA) assessment service, with just one of five regions left to be announced. Both Maximus and Ingeus have taken regions currently held by Atos.

The Functional Assessment Services contracts are replacing both PIP contracts and contracts to carry out WCAs for employment and support allowance (ESA) and universal credit (UC). The intention is that the same company will carry out both types of assessment in any given area, until such a time as the WCA is axed completely.

At the moment, WCAs are administered by Maximus and PIP assessments by Atos (known as IAS) and Capita, with Atos having the larger share of the PIP contracts.

However, that is all set to change from 2024, with the new contracts running until 2029.

Capita have managed to hold onto their current PIP regions: the Midlands, Wales and Northern Ireland

However, in South East England, London and East Anglia Atos are losing their contacts to the multinational welfare to work giant Ingeus.

Atos will also be replaced in the North of England and Scotland, this time by Maximus who currently only carry out WCAs. The new contract in Scotland will primarily cover WCAs, as PIP is being replaced by Adult Disability Payment (ADP).

The south west of England is currently covered by Atos for PIP assessments and the winner of the new contract has yet to be announced.

The full details of the lots awarded are:

Lot 1 North England and Scotland: Maximus UK Services Limited (currently Atos)


Lot 2 Midlands and Wales: Capita Business Services (currently Capita)

Lot 4 South East England, London and East Anglia: Ingeus UK Limited (currently ATOS)

Lot 5 Northern Ireland: Capita Business Services Limited (currently Capita)

You can [read the full commons statement on the new contracts here.](#)

# DWP cut off almost one million callers to a single helpline in a month

 PUBLISHED: 31 MAY 2023

The DWP cut-off almost a million callers to a single telephone helpline in the space of a month, official figures have revealed.

In a written parliamentary answer, DWP minister Laura Trott disclosed that between 27 January 26 March 2023, 1,007,868 calls were made to the Future Pension Centre helpline.

Of these, 47,345 were answered.

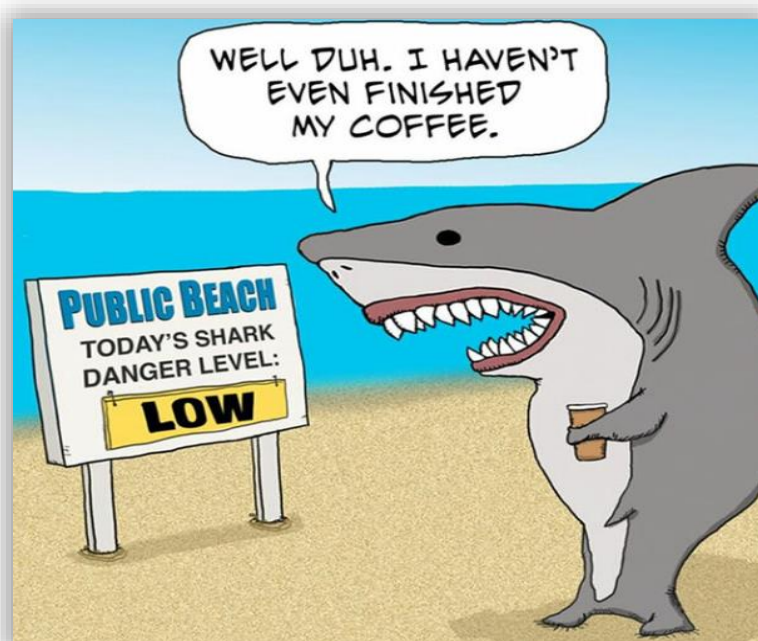
18,006 calls were abandoned.

And a staggering 942,517 calls were cut-off by the DWP


That means a shameful 94% of all calls were deliberately disconnected.

Back in May we were arguing that the DWP needed to come clean about how many calls to the PIP helpline have been cut-off in this way. This shock statistic makes an answer to our freedom of information request on the subject even more urgent.

You can [read the full written answer on the Future Pension Centre helpline here](#).



# Why are so few claimants choosing broadband social tariff?

 PUBLISHED: 31 MAY 2023

The BBC has reported that only one in twenty claimants who are eligible for social tariff broadband have actually signed up, with 4.3 million potentially eligible people apparently missing out. We'd like to hear about your experience if you've signed up for social tariff broadband or what made you decide against it.

Claimants on a range of benefits are eligible for social tariff broadband deals.

All the major suppliers offer a cheaper deal if you are on Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support.

Some also extend their offer to PIP claimants.

Prices range from £10 to £20 a month with speeds from 15 to 100 Mbits, depending on the supplier.

The Ofcom website has a [full list of suppliers and prices](#), with links to their individual terms and conditions.

Citizens Advice estimates that one million people have cancelled their broadband in the last year because of the cost of living, with UC claimants 12 times more likely to have done so than non-claimants.

Yet social tariff deals are not proving popular and Citizens Advice wants Ofcom to "*hold firms' feet to the fire*" to improve their take-up.

But is it just lack of awareness of these schemes that is holding people back? Or is it that mobile phones are a necessity while home broadband is an unaffordable luxury for many claimants, no matter how cheap the deal?

Please let us know your opinion of the scheme in the comments section.

You can [read the full story on the BBC website](#).



## America Faces a Tidal Wave of Aging Veterans, Including a 237% Increase in Women Over 65 by 2041

JUNE 1, 2023 | SONNER KEHRT

For decades, dawn brought the clarion bugle call of reveille across the lush campus of the Veterans Home of California in Yountville, 60 miles north of San Francisco. The residents, the earliest among them veterans of the Mexican-American war, rose early and dressed in strict accordance with a uniform-like code.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the veterans home was a working farm, with chickens, pigs, and a whole herd of cattle, along with apple, peach, and plum orchards. The men spent long days tending to the animals and working the land. The labor was believed to be restorative, giving order and purpose to generations of veterans suffering from what would soon become known as “shell shock.”

still in operation. After years of funding and other challenges—one inspection in 2016 found 14 separate fire safety deficiencies—**investments** in the home have ensured its future continuing to care for California’s veterans. No longer a working farm, the campus is home to more than 1,000 veterans, most of them elderly, with levels of support ranging from independent living to skilled nursing. Today, the campus hums with activity, as construction equipment reshapes the nation’s largest veteran home into one that can effectively and compassionately meet the changing needs of the state’s aging veteran population.



*Members of the Navy Band Northwest perform at the Veterans Home of California in Yountville, California, in 2018. Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob G. Sisco, courtesy of the U.S. Navy.*

As Vietnam and eventually Gulf War-era veterans grow older, they bring with them new needs, different expectations for care, and greater diversity than the Korean War and World War II veterans who came before them. The Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans organizations across the country are working to care for a new generation of older veterans who tend to have greater expectations for longevity and independence than earlier generations, yet also may struggle with more complex medical conditions.

“We’re kind of compounding multiple variables, in the sense that not only are people living longer, but ... many of them survived something that wasn’t survivable,” says Scotte Hartronft, the director of geriatrics and extended care at VA. “A lot of veterans have survived significant injuries over the last couple of conflicts that [they] wouldn’t have survived in previous wars.”

In California, the most populous state in the nation and home to the highest number of veterans, the California Department of Veterans Affairs, known as CalVet, the state's veterans department, is working to create a modern facility that centers the needs and dignity of older veterans. While the Yountville Veterans Home is unique—as the largest and one of the oldest veterans homes in the nation—across the country, people charged with caring for veterans grapple with the same question that drives the redesign of the facility: How do we best care for those who have served on our behalf as they grow old?

## ...More interesting reads...



### **Veterans' Home of California, Yountville, California**

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#### **A Brief History: In the Beginning**

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**Between 1869 and 1870 the Society of Mexican War Veterans first proposed a veterans home for California. The Legislature then passed a bill providing a plot of land in San Francisco for a home. The Mexican War Veterans were a not strong enough organization to spearhead construction of a home, and nothing was done until 1877 when the Lincoln Post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in San Francisco inaugurated measures to secure the land in the city and build a veterans' home.**

**In 1880, Col. J.J. Lyon stood before the post encampment and proposed that the GAR build a veterans' home (Lyon is often called the father of the veterans' home for his role in bringing plans into reality). A committee was appointed and took title to the San Francisco site donated by the Legislature in 1877, but then decided it would be a poor location. They wanted the home to be in the country where the members could have work as well as enjoy the beauty of the countryside.**

**They decided that the public, which had supported their wartime efforts, would also back a veterans' home association, and the group and planned a major fund raising in San Francisco on Thanksgiving weekend 1881.**

**...Every day is...**



Take care  
From the team V&F-LP

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