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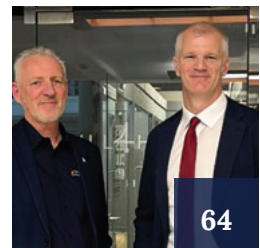
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Richard Davies, former Royal Air
Force Corporal, and our client.

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Is VALOUR the answer to Veterans' need for greater locally co-ordinated support?

BY ALAN SPENCE, EDITOR THEVETERAN.UK

"We are creating the UK's first ever data-driven framework for Veterans' services, ensuring our resources are channelled to where they're most needed and can make the greatest difference to those who have courageously served their country."



Alistair Carns OBE MC MP
Minister for Veterans & People

The Spring announcement by the Ministry of Defence of a major initiative – VALOUR – to ensure that Veterans throughout the UK maximise the use and value of available benefits and services is a welcome development, given the many, varied and, not to mention, sometimes confusingly duplicatory support programmes at national, regional and local level.

More specifically, VALOUR is aimed at helping to iron out inconsistencies in benefits and services between different areas and promoting collaboration between organisations to maximise the effectiveness of overall resource deployment. All backed by a substantial budget of some £50 million.

The move is part of the Government's "Plan for Change" designed to reset the country's commitment to Veterans, the majority of whom, according to a You Gov Poll, believe that locally co-ordinated support is insufficient – which the Office for Veterans Affairs takes as a mandate for concerted action.

Veterans across the North of England will be the first to benefit from VALOUR

with the OVA working with Greater Manchester and West and South Yorkshire to streamline support and create a blueprint for future networks across the UK, recognising regional differences and requirements.

Veterans in the North will be able to use the pilot service to access the help they need, such as housing, mental and physical health and employment guidance and services – all through VALOUR-recognised hubs.

The northern pilot will collect data across local government, service providers, the NHS and charities focused on Veterans' needs to finely hone the VALOUR service and shape policy for national rollout in 2026.

The core initial requirement is determining what is required, where and by how much, with the Office for Veterans Affairs seeking to establish this by collecting and analysing essential data to help guide the nature and alignment of, ideally, non-competing services and support through a series of around 40 regional field officers reporting back to the OVA.



The VALOUR launch event which took place in the Imperial War Museum North.

“We are creating the UK’s first ever data-driven framework for Veterans’ services, ensuring our resources are channelled to where they’re most needed and can make the greatest difference to those who have courageously served their country,” says Veterans Minister Al Carns.

The field officers will be embedded within both urban and rural regions, and their core focus will be linking local authorities, NHS, Veterans’ Charities and a variety of community leaders from both civil society and the Armed Forces Community.

Development funding will soon be available for existing and new veteran operations to gain VALOUR accreditation and help signpost those requiring support to the right place. Further information on development funding for the VALOUR support should be available later this year.

VALOUR HQ is at the Office for Veterans Affairs in the Ministry of Defence, but the evolving operational ethos will be meeting need at local level locally.

Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, is definitely a big fan of VALOUR.

“For too long veterans have not been properly looked after despite their service to this country,” he says.

“So it is great that the government has launched the VALOUR network to give former members of the Armed Forces the tailored support they deserve.

“In Greater Manchester we are proud of our Armed Forces Covenant which brings together our local authorities to support Veterans in their area. The VALOUR pilot will give us even more resources to support our Armed Forces community”.

“This scheme also highlights how improving lives in local communities can be done through further devolution, and we look forward to working alongside colleagues in the three other Combined Authorities to make this pilot successful.”

On the other side of the Pennines in Hull Paul Matson the founder of Veterans’ charity Hull 4 Heroes also welcomes VALOUR.

“I’m delighted that the Government is focusing on bringing all Veterans’ services together linked by hubs or networks to maximise efficiency”.

Although Hull and East Yorkshire are not within the initial pilot regions, Paul looks forward to engaging with VALOUR, especially as Hull4Heroes itself has always been predicated on working integratedly with local bodies, such as Hull City Council, the NHS, and other service providers and deploying local volunteers who know the Veteran community well. “That way beneficiaries have real names – they are not a case number on a national charity’s long list”, says Paul.

Being locally-focused, also assists fund raising,” says Paul. “Local supporters can see where and how their donations of time and money are deployed in the local community”.

An aerial photograph of a construction site, showing a large concrete slab with a grid of rebar and various construction equipment. Seven workers in high-visibility vests and hard hats are standing in a line on the slab, casting long shadows. The image has a blue tint.

COMBAT TO CONSTRUCTION

The Construction and Built Environment Sector is one of the most active in the UK economy, but suffers from a critical shortage of skills and people.

With around 14,000 people leaving the Armed Forces every year, the industry could certainly benefit from attracting more Veterans, but often isn't considered as an option during the resettlement process.

TheVeteran.UK's Managing Editor Mike Davis-Marks, explains...



In 2025, the UK construction industry stands at a pivotal moment. On the one hand, it's enjoying a wave of high-profile investment, bolstered by ambitious government targets to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the decade's end, while simultaneously advancing massive infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the Lower Thames Crossing.

On the other hand, it is grappling with an escalating skills crisis. The industry is haemorrhaging experience as workers retire, while simultaneously failing to attract enough young people to fill the gaps. Amid this skills vacuum, an overlooked and undervalued workforce is gaining long-overdue recognition: Armed Forces Veterans.

According to the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), the UK needs to recruit over 225,000 workers by 2027 to meet demand. With an ageing workforce, declining apprenticeship uptake, and the effects

of Brexit shrinking the labour pool, the search for skilled, motivated workers has never been more urgent.

Enter the Veteran community—a group often overlooked, yet uniquely equipped to thrive in demanding, safety-critical environments.

Service leavers bring with them a formidable set of transferable skills. Time management, problem-solving, teamwork under pressure, and operational planning are all part of a Veteran's toolkit. "The pace, complexity and stakes of a construction site are very familiar to anyone who's served," says Chris Stephenson, a former Royal Engineer and now a project manager for a national contractor. "It's about getting the job done, whatever it takes, with the team you've got."

But it's not just soft skills. Many Veterans leave the Armed Forces with qualifications in logistics, engineering, plant operation, or telecommunications – skills that slot neatly into the sector's growing need for technical proficiency.

They're also well-versed in health and safety protocols and bring a culture of compliance that is crucial on-site.

Organisations like BuildForce and the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) have been instrumental in connecting ex-service personnel with employers in construction. BuildForce, a nationwide initiative backed by industry leaders, offers mentoring, training, and work placements tailored to service leavers. Employers, in turn, benefit from access to a highly motivated workforce with proven reliability.

Some of the UK's largest construction firms who are leading by example include Balfour Beatty, Kier Group, and Laing O'Rourke have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, committing to Veteran hiring initiatives and creating Veteran-friendly working environments. Their programmes provide Veterans with structured pathways into the industry, recognising the value of military experience rather than demanding conventional CVs.



Take the example of former Royal Engineer Sergeant Lee Thompson. After 22 years of military service, including deployments in Afghanistan and the Balkans, he retrained as a site supervisor. Today, he oversees a multi-million-pound housing development in Yorkshire. “I was used to managing resources under pressure,” he says. “Shifting from commanding troops to coordinating tradespeople wasn’t as different as you’d think.”

The Ministry of Defence supports several schemes aimed at aiding transition to civilian life, including Career Transition Partnership (CTP) between itself and the Reed Partnership (a separate social enterprise entity within the global Reed Recruitment Group) which also involves The Forces Employment Charity running alongside.

Other organisations include Building Heroes and the Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) which play important roles in delivering site-ready training to ex-service personnel.

Meanwhile, British Forces Resettlement Forces (BFRS) runs a series of successful National Careers Fairs around the country in places strongly associated with the Armed Forces, including Catterick, Colchester and Aldershot. The Fairs feature a range of representatives from different aspects of the construction industry.

The benefits of hiring Veterans extend beyond plugging labour shortages. They bring cultural value: a respect for safety, chain of command, and quality workmanship. They raise morale, reduce site conflicts, and often serve as informal mentors to younger workers. Many Veterans also excel in health and safety roles, where their attention to detail and procedural thinking pays dividends.

“The Army taught me to assess risk, lead under pressure, and motivate teams, all of those skills are directly applicable to large-scale construction.”

Sarah Dalton
Former Army Captain

Of course, transitioning from military to civilian work isn’t without hurdles. Some Veterans face cultural dislocation, a lack of recognised qualifications, or mental health challenges related to

service. That’s why wraparound support is critical – not just in getting Veterans through the door but in keeping them there. Mentorship programmes, inclusive site cultures, and clear promotional paths are essential to long-term retention.

At Laing O’Rourke, former Army Captain Sarah Dalton now leads a project controls team. “The Army taught me to assess risk, lead under pressure, and motivate teams,” she explains. “All of those skills are directly applicable to large-scale construction. I’m not sure I would have known this career existed when I first left the military, but organisations like BuildForce connected the dots.”

In the coming years, the construction industry must look beyond traditional pipelines. The Veteran community represents not just a ready supply of trained professionals, but a reservoir of values that can help stabilise and transform the industry from within. As the UK builds back—both in concrete and community – it must do so with those who have already demonstrated their commitment to national service. This time, not in conflict zones, but on the scaffolds and sites that shape our shared future.





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EXPLAINING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

When we talk about the “Built Environment” in the UK, we’re referring to far more than buildings and roads. It’s the entire man-made space in which people live, work, and interact.

From housing developments and office blocks to transport networks, parks, bridges, schools, and energy infrastructure, the built environment shapes daily life for millions. It is a reflection of the nation’s ambitions, values, and challenges, and plays a fundamental role in the UK’s economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

At its core, the built environment encompasses all aspects of our surroundings that are constructed or modified by humans. This includes residential areas, commercial zones, public facilities, transportation systems, utilities, and green spaces created or maintained by planning and design.

It exists in constant dialogue with the natural environment – how buildings affect air quality, how roads intersect with ecosystems, and how urban planning impacts flood resilience.

In the UK, the built environment is an economic powerhouse. According to the Construction Leadership Council (CLC), the sector employs more than 2.3 million people and contributes around 9 per cent to the country’s GDP.

It drives job creation, innovation and skills development, and underpins national efforts to address some of the most pressing issues of our time – such as the housing crisis, climate change, and economic recovery post-pandemic.

Sustainability is now at the heart of conversations around the built environment. The UK government’s legally-binding target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 has cast a spotlight on how we design, construct and maintain buildings.

New-builds must meet high energy efficiency standards, and there is growing focus on retrofitting older structures to reduce emissions and improve living conditions. The built environment also encompasses transport infrastructure – railways, bus routes, cycle lanes and footpaths – that promote sustainable mobility and inclusive access to services.

Another critical aspect is social impact. The way spaces are designed can shape behaviour, support community cohesion, and even affect health outcomes. Poorly planned urban areas can contribute to social isolation, pollution, and inequality, while well-designed environments can foster wellbeing, productivity, and opportunity.

“In the UK, the built environment is an economic powerhouse. According to the Construction Leadership Council (CLC), the sector employs more than 2.3 million people and contributes around 9 per cent to the country’s GDP.”

Planning authorities, architects, engineers, surveyors, and construction firms all play a part in shaping the built environment. So too do policymakers, local councils, developers and residents. The challenge is balancing competing priorities: growth with green space, density with liveability, and cost with long-term benefit.

In the UK, the built environment is not static. It evolves with societal needs, technological advances, and climate imperatives. It is both a canvas for our ambitions and a test of our ability to build wisely, sustainably, and inclusively. Understanding what the built environment truly means helps ensure we don’t just build more – but build better.

VETERAN-FRIENDLY UK COMPANIES

Balfour Beatty

Balfour Beatty has been a trailblazer in Veteran recruitment. Since 2015, the company has pledged support through the Armed Forces Covenant and has been awarded the highest 'Gold' status under the Employer Recognition Scheme. Their Mulberry and Allies Network offers career guidance, workshops, and a support community for Veterans and their families. Currently employing approximately 350 Veterans, Balfour Beatty aims to recruit an additional 200 annually, matching the scale of its graduate program. Their goal is clear: Veterans should be offered the same visibility, pathways, and long-term opportunities as university graduates or apprentices.

www.balfourbeatty.com



Kier Group actively supports the Armed Forces community, recognizing the value Veterans bring to the construction industry. The company has signed the Armed Forces Covenant, demonstrating its commitment to providing opportunities for service leavers. Kier's initiatives focus on facilitating smooth transitions into civilian roles, offering training and mentorship programs tailored to Veterans' unique skill sets.

www.kier.co.uk

"Many Veterans leave the Armed Forces with qualifications in logistics, engineering, plant operation, or telecommunications – skills that slot neatly into the sector's growing need for technical proficiency."



Laing O'Rourke has established partnerships with organizations like BuildForce to connect Veterans with construction careers. The company's programs emphasize the alignment between military experience and construction needs, providing Veterans with pathways into roles that leverage their leadership, technical, and problem-solving skills.

www.laingorourke.com



Galliford Try recruits former service members through its targeted partnerships with Veteran employment charities. It focuses on transferable competencies such as teamwork and decision-making under pressure. Its programme includes site visits, mentoring, and career pathways in project delivery and civil engineering.

www.gallifordtry.co.uk

SKANSKA

Skanska UK actively recruits Veterans and has a well-regarded Armed Forces network internally. The business works with the Career Transition Partnership and BuildForce to offer placements, site visits, and mentoring. Their approach promotes a structured and respectful work environment that military leavers are well suited to thrive in.

www.skanska.co.uk



Wates Group values the leadership and technical capabilities Veterans bring. A signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant, Wates works closely with BuildForce to place former military personnel across a range of roles from commercial management to logistics. Their workforce includes many Veterans now in senior positions.

www.wates.co.uk



WILLMOTT DIXON

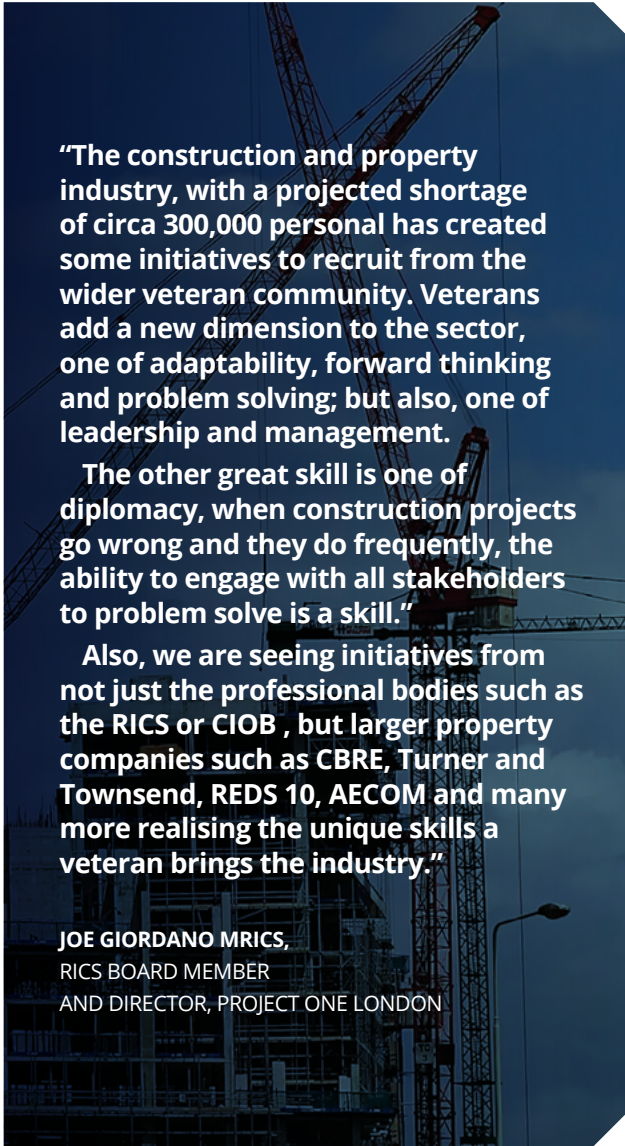
Willmott Dixon has championed Veteran recruitment for over a decade. Its 'Ex-Forces into Construction' programme runs in partnership with BuildForce, offering Veterans the chance to gain qualifications and job placements. The company believes military leavers bring leadership, discipline and a strong safety culture – all vital in construction.

www.willmotttdixon.co.uk



Costain proudly supports Veteran employment and has been recognised under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. Their internal Veterans Network offers peer support and career guidance, helping smooth the transition into civil infrastructure and engineering projects. They also engage with military charities to attract service leavers.

www.costain.com



"The construction and property industry, with a projected shortage of circa 300,000 personal has created some initiatives to recruit from the wider veteran community. Veterans add a new dimension to the sector, one of adaptability, forward thinking and problem solving; but also, one of leadership and management.

The other great skill is one of diplomacy, when construction projects go wrong and they do frequently, the ability to engage with all stakeholders to problem solve is a skill."

Also, we are seeing initiatives from not just the professional bodies such as the RICS or CIOB , but larger property companies such as CBRE, Turner and Townsend, REDS 10, AECOM and many more realising the unique skills a veteran brings the industry."

**JOE GIORDANO MRICS,
RICS BOARD MEMBER
AND DIRECTOR, PROJECT ONE LONDON**



Why UK Veterans are construction's natural leaders

Henry Annafi, a skilled human resource consultant with specialisms in both the construction industry and Veteran recruitment, makes a powerful case for employing ex-military personnel in a sector crying out for skilled personnel in senior leadership roles.

There is broad agreement that Veterans' hard and soft skills remain significantly underutilised by the UK construction industry at a time when labour and skills shortages at all levels of the industry are a prime restriction on the pace of growth in the industry, which, itself, is a key engine of economic expansion for the economy as a whole.

Veterans and the construction industry are not strangers. Many Veterans have traditionally looked to the sector for post-military employment in the sector, but in many cases this has involved lower skilled site work, which, whilst important to building projects, does not necessarily maximise the use of Veterans' soft and hard skills, and thus their potential value to both employees and their employers.

This isn't just a disservice to our Veterans; it's a critical missed opportunity for an industry crying out for skilled, reliable, and highly capable professionals at every level. The construction sector needs leaders, problem-solvers, and organisers just as much as it needs hands-on tradespeople. Veterans possess these qualities in abundance.

SHARED GROUND, SHARED VALUES

What truly makes Veterans such a compelling fit for mid-to-senior level construction roles goes beyond a simple list of skills; it's about a fundamental cultural alignment. Veterans step onto a construction site and find echoes of the environment they thrived in: a world defined by mission, team, and tangible results.

Veterans understand the rhythm of a project – the intense planning phase (like mission prep), the dynamic execution phase facing unforeseen obstacles (akin to operations), and the critical debrief and handover (post-project review).

They instinctively grasp the mission focus that drives construction – delivering a defined objective, on time and within budget, often under significant pressure.

The reliance on teamwork is absolute. Just as a military operation fails without seamless coordination between different specialisms, a construction project stalls without electricians, plumbers, steel fixers, and managers working in concert.

Veterans bring an ingrained understanding of cross-functional teamwork, knowing how to communicate clearly across disciplines, support colleagues under pressure, and pull together to overcome setbacks.

They embody resilience, accustomed to pushing through adversity, adapting plans when situations change (weather, supply chains, design tweaks), and maintaining focus until the job is done.

And crucially, both worlds share an uncompromising commitment to safety. The ingrained respect for procedures, risk assessment, and looking out for your mates translates directly into a powerful safety culture on site – not just compliance, but a genuine, lived value.

This shared DNA of discipline, mutual reliance, and purpose-driven work creates fertile ground where Veteran talent doesn't just fit; it flourishes and leads.

"Both sectors operate within clear hierarchies and chains of command, essential for managing complex, high-stakes operations."

One key problem is a clear and concise translation of military skills into their civil sector construction industry equivalents. Too often the exceptional leadership, strategic planning, crisis management, and meticulous logistical prowess honed in the Armed Forces are overlooked or misunderstood by civilian employers.

Think about it. Both sectors operate within clear hierarchies and chains of command, essential for managing complex, high-stakes operations. The sense of camaraderie forged through shared challenges, reliance on your team, and the deep satisfaction of completing a demanding objective is palpable on a busy site, mirroring the esprit de corps of military units.



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KEY CONSTRUCTION ROLES WHERE VETERANS EXCEL

This cultural synergy translates powerfully into specific, rewarding career paths beyond entry-level site work. Veterans possess the perfect blend of leadership, planning acumen, and practical problem-solving for roles that drive project success.

PROJECT MANAGER

This is command translated to the civilian sphere. The project manager is the linchpin, responsible for the entire project lifecycle – strategy, budget, timeline, resources, risk, and stakeholder communication. Veterans excel here because they've lived it: planning complex operations, allocating personnel and equipment with precision, mitigating risks proactively, leading diverse teams under intense pressure, and delivering critical objectives within tight constraints. Managing subcontractors feels familiar, akin to coordinating multi-cap badge teams towards a common goal. Their ability to hold the strategic vision while managing intricate details is invaluable.

CONTRACTS MANAGER / QUANTITY SURVEYOR (QS)

The financial and contractual backbone of any project. These roles manage costs, tenders, procurement, valuations, variations, and ensure contractual compliance. While requiring specific qualifications (which Veterans are highly capable of attaining), the core skills resonate deeply. Veterans understand managing complex specifications (mission parameters), meticulous administration and record-keeping, adherence to rules (contracts/regulations), cost control (budget management), negotiation, and mitigating financial risks. Their analytical rigour, integrity, and attention to detail are paramount assets.

HEALTH, SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT (HSE) MANAGER / ADVISOR

This is command translated to the civilian sphere. The project manager is the linchpin, responsible for the entire project lifecycle – strategy, budget, timeline, resources, risk, and stakeholder communication. Veterans excel here because they've lived it: planning complex operations, allocating personnel and equipment with precision, mitigating risks proactively, leading diverse teams under intense pressure, and delivering critical objectives within tight constraints. Managing subcontractors feels familiar, akin to coordinating multi-cap badge teams towards a common goal. Their ability to hold the strategic vision while managing intricate details is invaluable.



LOGISTICS / SUPPLY CHAIN COORDINATOR / MANAGER

Keeping a complex project moving requires masterful logistics – getting the right materials, plant, and people to the right place at the right time. This is the lifeblood of the Royal Logistic Corps and Quartermaster functions. Veterans are experts in orchestrating supply chains under demanding conditions, managing inventory, optimising transport, navigating procurement, and solving unforeseen logistical puzzles with limited resources. Their ability to “make it happen” ensures projects avoid costly delays and keeps the momentum flowing.



SCAFFOLDING ASSOCIATION TO BUILD INDUSTRY BRIDGE TO MILITARY VETERANS

“A military background for entering the scaffolding industry is ideal, scaffolding is process driven, just like the military. Moreover, it’s a place where multi-level skills interact to produce desired outcomes and everybody’s got to be on their ‘A’ game.”



Mark Parkin
Strategic Director
Scaffolding Association



**SCAFFOLDING
ASSOCIATION**

With a skills shortage thought to be running at around 25 per cent of the UK’s required needs, the Scaffolding Association, a trade membership body of over 650 companies, is planning to build bridges to the Armed Forces Community to attract increasing numbers of military Veterans to an industry fundamental to the country’s construction sector: without it nothing goes up very far.

Earlier this year the Association, founded by its Chief Executive Robert Candy in 2011, engaged Mark Parkin as Strategic Director.

A long-time scaffolding industry expert, former frontline managing director of scaffolding companies and founder of the Global Scaffolding Alliance (see box), Mark’s appointment was rooted in the Scaffolding Association’s commitment to further raise industry standards, especially surrounding safety, accelerate innovation and advocate for greater recognition of scaffolding as a highly skilled industry.

Speaking at the time of his appointment in March this year Mark said that during his 37 years in the scaffolding industry he had “not just been working within it, but striving to understand it at its core – its challenges, its opportunities, and the people who make it what it is”.

It’s a highly skilled occupation at many levels – especially high ones – which combine individual skills with teamwork and an acceptance that risk and safety issues are all pervasive and their mitigation must be iron-clad with individual and collaborative responsibility a vital element of teamwork.

Powerful echoes there of life in the military.

Speaking to TheVeteran.UK recently Mark was adamant that the skillsets developed by Veterans whilst serving in the Armed Forces are a perfect fit for those required by the scaffolding industry, and that a significant element of the Association’s strategic planning going forward will focus on attracting Veterans in to the industry as a core component of overall recruitment initiatives.

“A military background for entering the scaffolding industry is ideal”, he says. “Scaffolding is process driven, just like the military”. Moreover, it’s a place where multi-level skills interact to produce desired outcomes “... and everybody’s got to be on their ‘A’ game”.

Mark didn’t serve in the Armed Forces himself, but gained a deep insight into the values, work ethic and commitment which comes with life in the services from his father.



The latter's time doing National Service in the 1950s was spent as a PT instructor and a member of the military police – and included involvement in the 1956 Suez Crisis, the Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal Zone following its nationalisation by Egypt's President Nasser.

A scaffolder himself, Mark's father instilled in him the need for professional and personal resilience, respect and self-discipline.

He also steered him in to scaffolding immediately after completing his schooling in their hometown of Whitby on the East Yorkshire coast where Mark still lives.

"I absolutely love the industry and want to better it", he says.

Bettering it means, in essence, making scaffolding smarter, safer, faster, and greener by harnessing the benefits from new innovations and technologies.

These include:

- Digital design and planning
- Integrating scaffolding and construction plans to ensure they operate precisely and efficiently in tandem thereby avoiding mishaps and misunderstanding
- Use of augmented reality for scaffolders to familiarise themselves with scaffold structures before they arrive on site.
- Use of sensors to provide real time safety information, such as load monitoring, movement and vibrations
- The use of drones to inspect high level structural integrity and robots to perform repetitive scaffolding functions – and much more.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Global Scaffolding Alliance (gSA), founded by Mark Parkin in 2024, is an international initiative designed to bring together scaffolding professionals and organisations from around the world to create a collaborative platform focused on innovation, safety and excellence in the scaffolding industry.



Operating under the mantra of "Together As One" gSA aims to:

- Standardise training and qualifications by developing globally recognised scaffolding qualifications to ensure consistent standards across all regions;
- Enhance safety and best practices by sharing safety protocols and best practices to improve workplace safety and efficiency;
- Foster professional development with training programs and mentorship opportunities supporting career growth for individuals at all levels, from labourers to top managements levels.
- Assemble a global community where scaffolders can connect, share knowledge, and collaborate on industry advancements.

Individuals and organisations wishing to learn more about gSA's initiatives can visit the official website: www.gsalliance.global. Additionally, the gSA maintains an active presence on LinkedIn.

One of Mark's proudest moments in his 37 years of involvement in the scaffolding industry was his role as lead project manager for the planning and erection of the VIP Grandstand on Horse Guards' Parade for King Charles III's Coronation in May 2023.

"It involved meetings every Thursday for months with every stakeholder around the table – Ministry of Defence, Army, RAF, Royal Navy, Metropolitan Police, Royal Parks, Downing Street, politicians..." Inevitably, there were different views on how the project should be shaped and tackled, and one or two difficult moments when, for example, security, safety and capacity requirements needed closer alignment.

"In the end though we created a grandstand capable of safely holding 7200 people, compared with the original target of 5,200".

The project was also a valuable opportunity for Mark to get know

members of the Armed Forces by working with them on the project – and vice versa.

"I got to know one senior officer, for example, who was panicking about his forthcoming transition out of the Army".

"We had a few pints and I explained to him the correlation between strategic, methodical processes, values and morale of the Armed Forces and how they fitted in to a career in scaffolding".

"In fact, I became a bit of scaffolding jobs counsellor whilst I was there!".



FIND OUT MORE AT

www.scaffolding-association.org



BESA scheme aims to tackle critical training shortage

The Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) has launched a recruitment drive to address the industry's critical shortage of building services trainers and assessors.

It aims to recruit 100 trainers, assessors and building safety auditors through its Skills Legacy programme to plug an alarming gap that it says threatens to "leave the building services industry unable to train and assess new entrants to the sector or cope with increasing scrutiny of its safety processes following the Grenfell tragedy".

The Manly Trust, which has been supporting charities that work with young people and create opportunities through engineering training for 34 years, will fully fund the first 50 candidates who complete the assessment process.

"This is a game changing development for this crucial industry initiative," said BESA's head of skills & policy Stuart Rattray. "The shortage of trainers and assessors is a serious barrier to the recruitment and development of the next generation of engineers."

The Association said its Skills Legacy programme would recruit experienced engineers, including those from an armed forces background, who are motivated to give something back to their industry by passing on their expertise to help the further education (FE) sector meet growing demand from employers.

Competence

The scheme will also recruit building safety auditors to help the industry cope with new competence requirements created by the Building Safety Act.

"The shortage of trainers and assessors is a serious barrier to the recruitment and development of the next generation of engineers."

The Manly Trust was founded in 1991 by former BESA and CIBSE President Graham Manly in memory of his father Alfred Manly to provide financial assistance to charities that provide opportunities for young people in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and help advance engineering education.

It has since provided more than £1.8 million in funding through grants made to more than 130 different charities and causes.

A G Manly & Company, based in Wandsworth, was founded in 1948 and became one of the largest independent building services engineering firms in the UK. Graham joined the company in 1972 and became managing director 10 years later. The company was sold to Gratte Brothers in 2002.

Both Alfred and Graham served as presidents of the Heating & Ventilating Contractors Association (now BESA). Graham was also President of CIBSE in 2004 and was awarded an OBE for his contribution to building services engineering in 2012. He died in 2019.

"My father championed many causes throughout his 40-year career but had a particular passion for supporting young engineers through education, training, and career development," said Graham's son David Manly, who is a trustee.

"He set up the Trust to make sure this support would continue. Causes like BESA's Skills Legacy programme are exactly the sort of initiatives he envisioned as they work towards developing and promoting future generations of building services engineers."

BESA said the scheme should give FE colleges and other education providers greater reassurance that building engineering training courses would be supported. The lack of appropriately qualified people to deliver and assess training and apprenticeship schemes means the sector is regarded as 'high risk' by FE providers leading to a shortage of training capacity nationwide.

"Our workforce is ageing and is already under intense pressure," said Rattray. "The average age across construction related sectors is 53 so without a dramatic increase in numbers of young people coming in, a labour force crunch is looming.

"However, simply improving recruitment will not address the fundamental problems we face. Unless we address the shortage of trainers and assessors who can deliver programmes, the industry will be unable to meet demand within a few short years."

Pathway

BESA's nationwide scheme is bringing together employers, represented by the Association, and the FE sector to provide a pathway for anyone with the right skills, experience and qualifications to become a trainer or assessor qualified to a Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement (CAVA).

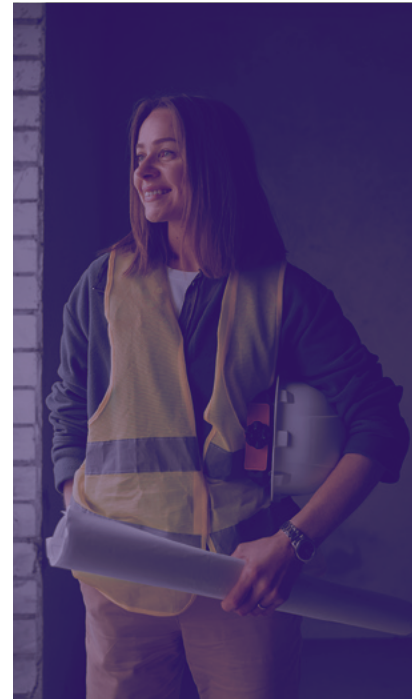
Those seeking to become qualified building safety auditors will be assessed in line with the ISO 9001 management standard.

"However, this goes beyond just working for your local FE college," said Rattray. "Employers also benefit from having trades assessors and auditors in-house for a variety of assessment requirements, including the new safety regime.

"The average age across construction related sectors is 53 so without a dramatic increase in numbers of young people coming in, a labour force crunch is looming."

"End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) are always looking for qualified assessors and quality assurance personnel, as are private training providers. So, individuals have lots of different ways to 'give something back' that will be of premium value to the industry and themselves."

Training to become an assessor/trainer will be delivered by the FE provider via a 'hybrid' remote and in-person format. BESA is also developing an assessor register and will work with educators and employers to celebrate those who complete the programme before embarking on their crucial role helping a new generation of apprentices.



For more information about joining this vital initiative, scan the QR code above or visit:

www.thebesa.com/skills-and-training/skills-legacy-assessor

More information about the Manly Trust can be found at:

www.manlytrust.uk



www.theBESA.com

Join BESA's Skills Legacy Programme – Now with Funded Opportunities!

BESA's nationwide scheme (with funding from the Manly Trust) is bringing together employers, represented by the Association, and the FE sector to provide a pathway for anyone with the right skills, experience and qualifications to become a trainer or assessor qualified to a Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement (CAVA).

- ✓ Share your expertise and mentor the next generation.
- ✓ Explore new career pathways with training and assessment opportunities.
- ✓ Help expand training capacity across the UK. This isn't just a project – it's a movement.

Ready for a career change or want to support apprentices?

Learn more:

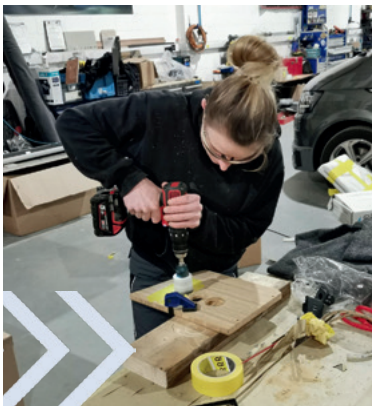
www.thebesa.com/skills-and-training/skills-legacy-assessor





THE LEADING TRI-SERVICE MILITARY TO CONSTRUCTION CHARITY

Providing the blueprint for your next career



Offering the military community with funded* qualifications and dedicated support leading to employment, self employment or further training for a new career in the construction industry.

*Eligibility criteria applies, see website FAQs for further details.



To utilise the military skill set and meet industry needs we deliver a range of certified courses including:

- Construction Skills
- Groundworks / Streetworks
- Green Skills - Retrofit
- Plant Operations

Courses delivered across England. Our industry-linked programmes connect you with trusted employer partners across the UK - from national contractors to regional specialists.

**Find out more
Apply now!
Scan the QR**



0330 912 6200

info@buildingheroes.org.uk

www.buildingheroes.org.uk/courses

Registered Charity Number: 1158886



Transforming Lives Through Skills

City & Guilds Training Partnership with HMP Highpoint

Reoffending costs the UK economy over £21bn annually, creating immense pressure on frontline services, while trapping individuals in devastating cycles of custody. With over 87,000 prisoners in England and Wales and an average cost of £51,000 per prisoner, our prison system represents significant untapped potential for skills development and genuine rehabilitation.

The statistics tell a stark story: around 80% of offending is reoffending. However, latest data reveals a powerful solution – employment dramatically changes outcomes, with reoffending rates dropping by approximately half when prison leavers secure work within six weeks of release.

"Being given the opportunity to stay away from trouble, not having to go and reoffend for the sake of money, it all comes down to job opportunities. Gaining the skills I needed to get onto the railway; it gave me the opportunity to get straight into work upon leaving prison. It just totally minimised the possibility of me going back and reoffending."

ALUMNI LEARNER



A Revolutionary Approach to Rehabilitation

City & Guild's Training has pioneered a groundbreaking response to this challenge through its partnership with HMP Highpoint, creating the UK's first Rail Engineering Centre of Excellence skills hub. This first-of-its-kind model transforms how we approach prisoner rehabilitation, moving beyond traditional education to deliver industry-standard training with **guaranteed employment** outcomes upon release.

Our innovative four-stage process delivers real results:

- **Stage 1:** Prisoners are recruited based on real employer demand in specific industries and local areas, ensuring training leads directly to available jobs.
- **Stage 2:** Selected individuals transfer to HMP Highpoint for intensive, hands-on industry training combined with direct employer engagement, creating authentic workplace connections.
- **Stage 3:** Trainees return to their local prison for local release.
- **Stage 4:** A guaranteed job opportunity awaits on release, supported by comprehensive pastoral care and ongoing support.



Expanding Impact Across Industries

Building on our rail engineering success, we have expanded the HMP Highpoint model to include Construction Plant training facilities. Our diversification now spans construction trades, Streetworks qualifications, green skills, and other high-demand sectors, multiplying opportunities for meaningful career pathways.

Working in partnership with over 120 prisons across England and Wales, we collaborate directly with employers and HM Prison & Probation Service to ensure our training meets real industry needs while providing the wraparound support essential for successful reintegration.

This isn't just about reducing reoffending statistics – it's about transforming lives. When we provide genuine skills training and guaranteed employment opportunities, we create life-changing impact that extends far beyond individual prisoners to their families and communities, building a safer, more productive society for everyone.

About City & Guilds Training



Who We Are

City & Guilds Training is at the forefront of transforming technical education in the UK. As a market-leading provider of in-demand, industry-recognised training solutions, we are committed to raising standards in technical education, empowering individuals to get into the job, progress on the job and onto the next job.

We understand that transitioning from military service to civilian employment is one of the most significant challenges veterans face. That's why we've made supporting ex-service personnel a core part of our mission – helping you translate your military experience into rewarding civilian careers.

As a charitable organisation, we're driven by purpose, not profit. Our commitment to veterans goes beyond training – we're invested in your long-term success and career progression.

A Team That Understands Your Journey

We're proud to employ ex-service personnel across our organisation – from instructors who've walked the same path you're on, to operations staff and senior leadership who understand the unique value veterans bring to the workplace. This isn't just about offering training; it's about building a community where your service experience is recognised and valued.

CASE STUDY

Mark Turner's Journey

From Warrant Officer to Head of Operations former Royal Engineer Mark Turner exemplifies how military experience translates into civilian leadership success.

After 24 years of distinguished service, including multiple operational tours in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, Mark faced the daunting prospect of civilian transition in 2011. However, his military career had unknowingly prepared him perfectly for his next chapter.



During his service with the Royal Engineers, Mark gained extensive City & Guilds qualifications – from Level 3 artisan trade qualifications through to his Level 6 Graduateship Award (GCGI) in Leadership and Management. This foundation proved invaluable when transitioning to civilian employment.

"The military had inadvertently prepared me for my career in education," Mark explains. "The skills, experiences, and mindset you develop over 24 years of service allow you to adapt to new ventures, new people, and ultimately a new career."

Starting as a teacher at City & Guilds Training, Mark's military-honed leadership abilities quickly became apparent. He progressed through centre management roles to his current position as Head of Operations, leading a team of 61 personnel across five sites spanning delivery, customer care, and NVQ departments.

Mark's commitment to the military community extends far beyond his day job. He mentors junior soldiers gaining their EngTech professional engineering status through the Institute for Royal Engineers (InstRE) and sits on the Education Panel of the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET), bridging military and civilian engineering expertise.

This dedication to service is embedded throughout City & Guilds Training's culture. The organisation actively supports military exercises, where ex-military personnel advise current military training, and regularly raises funds for Combat Stress through initiatives like their VE Day Brew and Bake event, which raised over £1,000.

Mark hasn't forgotten his roots either. He actively recruits veterans from all three services plus emergency services, with former military personnel now serving as Centre Managers, NVQ Managers, and teachers. He regularly attends military resettlement fairs and unit briefings, sharing his story and highlighting career opportunities in education.



"City & Guilds Training understands the value veterans bring," Mark emphasises. "We don't just offer training – we offer career progression and the chance to make a real difference in people's lives."



How City & Guilds Training can support veterans with skills, training and employment

Your Military Skills Are Your Foundation

Your military service has already equipped you with invaluable skills: discipline, leadership, problem-solving under pressure, and the ability to work as part of a team. We specialise in helping you build on these foundations with industry-recognised qualifications that employers actively seek.

Our Veteran-Focused Approach

- **Tailored Career Pathways**
We work with you to identify how your military experience translates to civilian sectors. We help map your skills to appropriate training programmes.
- **Flexible Learning Options**
Understanding that veterans often have family commitments and other responsibilities, we offer flexible training schedules including evening classes, weekend sessions, and blended learning approaches that fit around your life.
- **Continuous Support**
We offer one-to-one mentoring, career counselling, and pastoral support, as well as career guidance on progression.
- **Industry Connections**
Our strong relationships with employers mean we can give you a head start in your job search. Our mission is to support you into the job, on the job, and onto the next job.

Training That Leads to Employment

We focus exclusively on sectors with genuine skills shortages and clear career progression routes. The programmes we offer are designed in collaboration with Awarding Organisations (AOs), membership bodies, and industry employers, ensuring you gain relevant skills and competence that lead to immediate employment opportunities.

"We focus on building strong foundational skills and providing clear routes to recognised qualifications, helping you take confident steps toward a secure and rewarding, long-term career."

Our programmes are:

- Aligned with current market demands
- Designed to lead to sustainable employment
- Supported by career development opportunities

Our training programmes are designed with career changers in mind, offering flexible pathways. We focus on building strong foundational skills and providing clear routes to recognised qualifications, helping you take confident steps toward a secure and rewarding, long-term career.

Find out more at www.cityandguildstraining.com

Training Programmes and Career Opportunities

Real Career Progression

These aren't just jobs – they're careers with clear progression paths. Many of our veteran graduates move into supervisory roles within 2-3 years, with opportunities to become self-employed contractors or progress into management positions.

**HIGH-DEMAND
TRAINING SECTORS**



Electrical Installation

Perfect for veterans with technical backgrounds, our electrical courses lead to roles in domestic, commercial, and industrial settings. Average starting salaries: £25,000-£30,000, progressing to £40,000+ with experience.

Training options include:

- Level 2 & Level 3 Diploma in Electrical Installations
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations
- PAT Testing
- Inspection & Testing qualifications
- Safe Isolation
- Basic Electrical Maintenance



Construction Trades

From carpentry to plumbing, construction offers diverse opportunities with strong job security. Many veterans appreciate the practical, problem-solving nature of these roles.

Training options include:

- Bricklaying and Site Management qualifications
- Steel Fixing / Carpentry / Formwork
- New Roads & Streetworks
- Traffic Management
- Construction Plant
- Warehousing
- Scaffolding



Rail Engineering

The expanding rail network offers excellent career prospects. Your military precision and safety awareness are highly valued in this sector.

Training options include:

- Permanent Way Track Engineering
- Overhead Line Engineering
- Signalling and Telecoms
- Plant and Rail Machinery



Renewable Energy

A rapidly growing sector where your technical skills can contribute to the UK's green energy future. Excellent long-term career prospects with above-average salaries.

Training options include:

- Solar PV Installation
- Air Source Heat Pump Installation
- Electrical Energy (Battery) Storage
- Electric Vehicle Charging

Getting Started

Ready to take the next step? Contact our veteran support team at info@cityandguilds.ac.uk or visit www.cityandguildstraining.com. We'll arrange a consultation to discuss your background, career goals, and the best training pathway for your future.



Training

Industry-Leading Training for Veterans

Transform your service experience into a rewarding civilian career with City & Guilds Training

Training that leads to employment across in-demand sectors:

- Electrical installation
- Construction trades
- Rail engineering
- Renewable energy

Why veterans choose us:

- Tailored career pathways
- Flexible learning options
- Continuous support
- Industry connections
- A team of ex-service personnel



SCAN THE QR
CODE TO VISIT
OUR WEBSITE

Ready to turn your service into a successful civilian career?

info@cityandguilds.ac.uk



BRITISH BUSINESS BANK

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS IN THE UK'S DEFENCE SME SUPPLY CHAIN



As the UK and its NATO allies commit to strengthening their defence capabilities, the coming years will see significant investment in national security, innovation, and resilience.

The UK Government's defence spending is projected to rise to 2.6% of GDP by the end of this decade, and 5% (including infrastructure) by 2035 – a historic increase that will reshape supply chains and unlock major opportunities for agile, high-performing smaller businesses.

One of the most exciting prospects within this evolving landscape lies in the contribution of veterans.

Former members of the Armed Forces bring with them a unique blend of leadership, discipline, resilience, and technical acumen – qualities that are in high demand across the defence and security sector.

Whether it's engineering, cyber security, logistics, systems integration, or infrastructure, businesses run by veterans are well-positioned to play a pivotal role in this next generation of defence delivery.

At the British Business Bank, we recognise the importance of ensuring access to finance for those looking to turn their service-learned skills into successful business ventures.

Our **Start Up Loans** programme offers personal loans of up to £25,000 to aspiring entrepreneurs – alongside expert business mentoring and support.

For veterans considering a leap into entrepreneurship, this package can provide the foundation to launch or grow a business that meets the emerging demands of defence primes, MOD procurement, or NATO-aligned innovation funds.

“FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES BRING WITH THEM A UNIQUE BLEND OF LEADERSHIP, DISCIPLINE, RESILIENCE, AND TECHNICAL ACUMEN – QUALITIES THAT ARE IN HIGH DEMAND ACROSS THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY SECTOR.”

Increased defence spending is not only about military hardware.

It includes investment in new technologies, sustainability, advanced manufacturing, data security, and infrastructure – many of which favour businesses that are flexible, innovative, and mission-driven.

For veterans who already understand defence culture, procurement processes, and operational needs, there is a clear competitive advantage.

We've seen encouraging examples of veterans starting businesses in drone technology, field communications, training and simulation, and cybersecurity – often leveraging their experience, contacts, and credibility from military service.

With initiatives like the Government's SME Action Plan for Defence and the Open Call for Innovation, the door is wide open for smaller businesses to engage directly with defence buyers.

The British Business Bank exists to ensure that access to finance is never a barrier to ambition.

If you're a veteran ready to take your next step – whether that's designing modular equipment, offering maintenance services, or deploying data solutions – the Start Up Loans programme could be your launchpad.

In this new era of defence investment, veterans are more than just contributors—they're natural leaders.

Let's equip them with the tools to build businesses that support national security, economic growth, and meaningful post-service careers.

Richard Bearman
Chief Development Officer
British Business Bank



To learn more about the Start Up Loans programme, visit:

www.startuploans.co.uk



From Surgical Robotics to the Zest of the Kitchen

Edinburgh-based Jamie Cleland – Founder of Big Jim's Kitchen – produces the world's only Scottish Whisky barrel aged hot sauces.

Jamie's self-stated mission is to create hot sauces with flavours that bring out the best in food and your day. He believes that it's all about good food, good company and being genuine, and that has become the heart of the Big Jim's Kitchen community.

For someone with a background in anaesthetics, surgery, and robotics, creating a range of vibrant hot sauces may seem like an unusual direction in which to change career. However, it becomes apparent very quickly from speaking to Jamie that this

is about passion and pursuing what ignites his spirit. And that is an excellent motivator for a small business owner.

When Covid hit, Jamie was working in a surgical robotics start-up in Edinburgh helping to implement their first system at the Western General Hospital. Unfortunately, due to stressors brought on by both work and the pandemic, mental health issues forced Jaime to leave his position.

"I really dived into cooking, which has always been a real passion of mine," Jamie explains. "When I was younger I wanted to be a chef. So, I started making my own hot sauces, just for myself. I was doing a bit of barbecuing in the garden, trying to get back to a good place. Then

I started giving the sauces out to some friends."

The feedback from Jamie's friends was fantastic and it was they who suggested that his flavour and spice combinations – along with the unique concept of ageing them in whisky barrels – would make for a great business idea.

Jamie's father and brother both proudly served in the Royal Marines, which was how he came across X-Forces Enterprise. As a Specialist Business Support Partner for the British Business Bank, we were delighted to support him with a Start Up Loan of £20,000 and to guide him through the process. An experience he describes as being extremely helpful:



"The X-Forces Enterprise team were amazing at coaching me through and enabled me to build my business plan to a point where I could put it forwards and get the funding. So it's amazing to have them there to help guide me along the way, and if it wasn't for their advice I wouldn't be where I am."

Starting with selling at markets and through his online store, Jamie now has his sauces on the shelves of over 20 outlets. He was also approached by Scottish Design Exchange who support artists and artisans to get their products into locations with good passing trade.

"The idea is that you rent a shelf space," Jamie explains. "and then you get all of the proceeds from the sale. They have one in Buchanan Galleries in Glasgow and one on George Street in Edinburgh."

Having done everything himself up until now – branding design, recipes, making the product, fulfilment, and shipping – the next step in the evolution of Big Jim's Kitchen is a deal with a third party manufacturer who can handle production, allowing Jaime to focus on getting his creations into more stores. That's not to say he won't have his own production facility in the future!

Founder and CEO of X-Forces Enterprise, Ren Kapur MBE, commented:

"Big Jim's was born out of passion, creativity, and a love for bold flavour – but to turn that vision into a real business, Jamie needed belief and backing. That's where X-Forces Enterprise and Start-Up Loans came in. Our support gave him the funding and the confidence to launch something truly special. Now, he's bottling the spirit of Scotland – one whiskey-infused sauce at a time."

When asked if there was anything else he'd like to get across to our readers, Jaime opted not to talk about his business but to flag up a not-for-profit organisation called Andy's Man's Club that's doing great work with people who have suffered with mental health problems:

"It's a forum that is very open for anybody to come to, and an opportunity for people that maybe feel they can't talk to, or wouldn't like to talk to, the people immediately close to them. They can go to a completely non-judgmental space to hear other people talking about their problems, and also talk about their own."

Selfless, talented, resilient, creative. The future is bright for Jamie and Big Jim's Kitchen.

"The X-Forces Enterprise team were amazing at coaching me through and enabled me to build my business plan to a point where I could put it forwards and get the funding."

For more information about Jamie's business, visit:

Website:

www.bigjimskitchen.com

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/bigjimshotsauce

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/bigjims.hotsauce





Pull the Pin: Celebrating Life's Journey

Pull The Pin Spirits is a premium spirit brand founded by Tom Foster, a former Army Commando, whose transition from military service to distillation is both unique and inspiring. The brand's ethos is deeply rooted in celebrating life and commitment to quality.

Tom's Army journey took him to Albania, Brunei, Norway, and beyond. Unfortunately, serious injuries meant that he had to leave his military career behind – this wasn't easy as it was all he had known throughout his adult life and a major part of his identity.



Given his physical limitations, a 'job' wasn't going to offer the flexibility Tom needed. He also wanted some excitement. So, the self-employment route made sense. But why spirits?

The inspiration came from his time in Albania where Tom noticed the locals making a crude form of Raki using the heating elements from kettles. During downtime on operations, he decided to give it a go himself – and a passion for distillation was born.

Early experiments in spiced rum taught Tom the importance of balance, especially after overusing cloves led to mouth-numbing effects! A Caribbean sailing trip allowed him to sample diverse rums, refining his vision for the perfect spiced rum. While training Saudi forces, Tom attended a royal banquet where a dessert infused with cardamom and nutmeg captivated him, inspiring his quest for harmonious spice blends.



“ Tom discovered X-Forces Enterprise during a rehabilitation course at Headley Court and as the British Business Bank’s Specialist Business Support Partner for the Armed Forces community, we were delighted to provide him with a Start Up Loan of £25,000. ”

Tom happily admits to being fascinated by the ‘mad scientist’ element of the business, and it isn’t a surprise, given his roots:

“Playing with the flavours and the spices is the bit I love the most, and learning the intricacies of distillation. My mum and dad were both chefs and in cooking you learn how to develop flavours and mix certain elements to get the right outcome. If you’re getting it right, it’s amazing, but you can also get it very wrong!”

Tom discovered X-Forces Enterprise during a rehabilitation course at Headley Court and as the British Business Bank’s Specialist Business Support Partner for the Armed Forces community, we were delighted to provide him with a Start Up Loan of £25,000. Tom used the funding to get Pull The Pin off the ground and establish a production facility.

The plan was to open up tasting sessions and cocktail events onsite but market research told him that, post-Covid, people’s socialising habits had changed. Like many resourceful ex-military folk, Tom decided to pivot and make the most of his connections:

“We decided to do Mess Nights and corporate events where we offer a package: we make fresh fruit cocktails, we do a talk, we take our rums and gins. We also go to people’s homes and offices which works really well because it’s in their environment, we go to them.”

As he looks to the future, Tom hopes to expand and take his concoctions on the road. So, if you’re looking for a fascinating evening with high-end, premium drinks, why not celebrate life’s journey with Pull The Pin?

For more information about Tom’s business, visit:

Website:

www.pullthepinspirits.com

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/pullthepinspirits

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/pullthepinspirits





Veterans And Start-Ups – It's A Family Thing

It could be said that working with Veterans and start-ups is the Bloomhill family business. For generations they have served in uniform, supported ex-military personnel, and worked with charities in the Armed Forces community.

Tyler Bloomhill, from North West Leicestershire, served in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was inspired to start his own business when, in 2021, his father began to help his brother-in-law with his fledgling waste management company.

Tyler explains: *"When I was exposed to the operational side of things, the seed of an idea was*

planted – how to build a business that also incorporated my values and commitment to supporting the Forces community. In late 2022, the process of leaving full-time military employment was underway and I started thinking about my career transition and future work."

Tyler had been exposed to his entrepreneurial family's businesses since he was young, so it was a natural progression to for him make the move from the Army to enterprise.

"I had come to realise that the waste business was an excellent way to earn a living and at the same time make a significant social and environmental impact, two things close to my heart," he says. *"I knew there was much to learn, and joining*

all the dots was complicated. This is where my community, friends and other Veterans came to my aid."

Funding of just under £10,000 was secured through X-Forces Enterprise, a Business Support Partner to the Government's Start Up Loans scheme, and Tyler's waste management company KwikTip Ltd was born. The business specialises in the collection, transport, and disposal of general and hazardous waste for businesses and households.

While Tyler had plenty of insight into the industry through his family connections, he recognised that the day-to-day of running and growing a business was an area in which he needed knowledge. Consequently, he attended the full range of workshops offered by X-Forces



“ Funding of just under £10,000 was secured through X-Forces Enterprise, a Business Support Partner to the Government’s Start Up Loans scheme, and Tyler’s waste management company KwikTip Ltd was born. ”



Enterprise and supported by ABF The Soldiers’ Charity. From here he developed skills in business start-up, planning, budgeting, cashflow, marketing and more.

Describing his interaction with X-Forces Enterprise, Tyler enthuses: *“I signed up for a number of amazing business workshops and Masterclasses, all of which really gave me the foundation I needed to run this business. The wider X-Forces Enterprise network and some incredibly experienced mentors and entrepreneurs (including XFE Ambassador James Wilthew and Trainer Roger Cawte) have been crucial.”*

Of course, like many new entrepreneurs, Tyler has faced his share of challenges along the way. However, KwikTip Ltd is in a good place and he had some words of

wisdom for those leaving in the military who are keen to follow in his enterprising footsteps:

“Remember that every day is a school day – you need to be willing to learn and make mistakes. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Have perspective and patience. Never blame and take extreme ownership.”

As for the future, Tyler plans to grow KwikTip through the Service Leavers community, getting Veterans involved and providing them with the opportunity to run their own branches. His favourite part of being self-employed is that it means he has to keep developing himself in order to grow the business – an excellent ethos and one that is clearly working.

For more information about Tyler’s business, visit:

Website:

www.kwiktip.co.uk

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/kwiktip

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/kwiktip





START AND GROW YOUR BUSINESS

SUPPORT FOR THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

- > **TRAINING**
- > **BUSINESS FINANCE**
- > **ONGOING SUPPORT**

X-Forces Enterprise is the leading provider of business support for the Armed Forces community.

A comprehensive package of fully-funded services equips aspiring business owners with the understanding and tools they need to thrive in self-employment.



x-forces.com

SERVICE LEAVERS | RESERVISTS | VETERANS | SPOUSES | FAMILY

PROUD PARTNER OF THE BRITISH BUSINESS BANK





Finalists Revealed for the 2025 Soldiering On Awards

CELEBRATING DEDICATION, COURAGE, AND COMMUNITY

It is with immense pride and admiration that Soldiering On Awards announce the line-up of exceptional finalists for 2025.

Now in their 15th year, these prestigious Awards shine a light on the unwavering spirit of the Armed Forces community, honouring ordinary people who have achieved the extraordinary. Across twelve diverse categories, from Family Values to Business Start-Up and Animal Partnership to Defence Inclusivity, this year's finalists embody the resilience, humility, and selflessness that define the very best of our society.

Guided by integrity and purpose, Co-Chairs of Judges Lt Gen (Ret'd) Richard Nugee CB CVO CBE and Debra Allcock-Tyler, CEO of the Directory of Social Change, led a distinguished panel in an incredibly tough judging process. From an inspiring field of nominations, they selected 38 outstanding finalists whose courage, compassion, and commitment are nothing short of remarkable.

Our outstanding finalists were honoured at a special reception in July at the House of Lords, hosted by Awards Patron, the Rt Hon Earl Howe GBE PC. The winners will be revealed at a spectacular black-tie ceremony on Wednesday, 22nd October 2025, at London's Park Plaza Westminster Bridge Hotel, where broadcasting legend Jeremy Vine will once again act as host.



"The 2025 Soldiering On Awards finalists embody the very best of our Armed Forces community, and I'm delighted to congratulate them all on their well-deserved recognition. Their selfless commitment goes beyond duty, demonstrating what it truly means to serve your country, and this government is committed to renewing the nation's contract with those who serve"

Alistair Carns OBE MC MP
Minister for Veterans & People

Members of the public will also have their say, with voting in two categories, Animal Partnership and Inspiration, via www.soldieringon.org from 15th July to 3rd August.



Meet the finalists

Register your public vote at www.soldieringon.org/placeyourvote

PUBLIC VOTE

Animal Partnership Award

*In partnership with
Pets at Home*

An award to honour the unique relationships and companionship provided by animals, and/or the achievements of individuals or organisations engaged with animals that support and empower members of the Armed Forces community. The winner will be decided by public vote.

- Archie and Cocoa
- Richard Mearns and Assistance Dog Ziggy
- Vicky McLennan and Dexter

PUBLIC VOTE

Inspiration Award

*In partnership with
NatWest*

An award to honour a person that has overcome significant challenges, injury or disability, and whose ongoing or past outstanding achievements are an inspiration to others within the Armed Forces community. The winner will be decided by public vote.

- Anna Baker Cresswell
- Gregg Stevenson MBE
- Joanne Gordon
- Mark Ormrod MBE

Healthcare & Rehabilitation Award

*In partnership with
Redwood Technologies Group*

An award to honour a person or team that has demonstrated a major commitment and contribution in support of the physical or mental welfare of serving or former members of the Armed Forces community. This may be through healthcare, therapeutic treatment or rehabilitation services and support.

- Combat Stress – QED Team
- Karolina Grzyb
- Veterans at Ease

Defence Inclusivity Award

*In partnership with
Barclays*

An award to honour the commitment and achievements of an individual, team or organisation in delivering greater diversity and inclusion within UK defence and the Armed Forces community.

- Maj Munish Chauhan
- Lt Col Rachel Diss (ACF)
- WO1 Sim Rezazadeh-Wilson

Family Values Award

*In partnership with
Pinnacle Service Families*

An Award to honour a person, family or group whose selfless commitment, dedication and support for others in the Armed Forces Community ensures that they are cared for, supported or helped. This selfless act is therefore a shining example to society.

- Joanne Gordon
- Park Holidays UK
- Veterans in Crisis Sunderland

Business Start-Up Award

*In partnership with
GKN Aerospace*

An award to honour an individual or group of individuals linked with the Armed Forces community who have started a successful new business venture within the last two years (since January 1st, 2022) and who still retain a minimum of 50% interest in the venture.

- Laura Gardner – Purendure
- Lotty Laverton – Weebert's World at We Are Bert Ltd
- Rob Colley – Thrival Instinct

“Every nomination tells a wonderful story of courage, passion, and community. The humility with which these individuals carry their accomplishments is deeply moving. The Soldiering On Awards play a vital role in recognising their efforts and amplifying their voices. Congratulations to all our 2025 finalists, you are the beating heart of our military family and an inspiration to us all.”

Lt Col Ren Kapur MBE
CEO of Soldiering On Awards and Academy



Business Scale Up Award

*In partnership with
LSEG Foundation*

An award to honour an individual or group of individuals linked with the Armed Forces community who have started a successful new business venture more than two years ago (before January 1st, 2022) and who still retain a minimum of 50% interest in the venture.

- Aaron Florence – Brimstone Site Investigation
- Adam Casey and Nathan Tittensor – tmc3 Ltd
- Paul Montgomery – Sir-Fix-A-Lock

Community Impact Award

*In partnership with
BAE Systems*

An award to honour a charity, social enterprise, or other third sector organisation that has made a significant positive impact on the lives of specific beneficiary cohorts within the Armed Forces community. This impact should be evidenced within the last three years; since 1st January 2022.

- Active Plus CIC
- RBLI
- Scotty's Little Soldiers

Education, Training & Development Award

*In partnership with
Reed in Partnership*

An award to honour excellence in the provision of vocational education, training, or skills development for members of the wider Armed Forces community. This may be delivered by an individual, team or organisation.

- Andy Gallie
- TechVets
- Essex Army Cadets and the Royal College of Nursing

Employee Champion Award

*In partnership with
Landmarc Solutions*

An award to honour an exceptional individual who has made a significant contribution to support members of the Armed Forces community achieve success within civilian roles, championing the employability of service leavers, reservists, veterans, spouses and family members.

- Chris Ackerman – Mott MacDonald
- Gary Woodford – RBLI
- Nicky Howse – Barclays
- Steven Chessell – JLR

Working Together Award

*In partnership with
Forces in Mind Trust*

An award to honour a group of people, team or organisation that has demonstrated an enduring commitment to a collaborative approach, engaging with others to support the sector within the wider Armed Forces community.

- Barratt Redrow
- Cleveland Police
- East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust – Armed Forces Veteran Team

Lifetime Achievement Award

*In partnership with
Oracle*

An award to honour a person whose lifetime of dedicated service has provided a significant contribution in support of the Armed Forces community.

- Dr David Trotman
- Richard Tucker MBE
- Sarah Geddes



MISSION EVEREST

TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD AND BACK AGAIN IN 7 DAYS

In a feat that has captured global attention, four British military veterans have completed a record-breaking expedition: traveling from London to the summit of Mount Everest and back in just under seven days.

The team – comprising Veterans Minister **Colonel Alistair Carns**, **Major Garth Miller**, **Anthony “Staz” Stazicker**, and **Kevin Godlington** – achieved this unprecedented turnaround by leveraging cutting-edge acclimatisation techniques, including the pioneering use of xenon gas.

Mike Davis-Marks explains...



A MISSION BEYOND THE SUMMIT

Dubbed "Mission: Everest," the expedition aimed not only to set a new speed record but also to raise funds for UK Armed Forces and veterans' charities, with a particular focus on supporting bereaved military families. As of late July, the campaign had garnered well over £100,000 in donations, including Gift Aid. Colonel Carns, a decorated former Royal Marines officer and current Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak, emphasized the mission's broader purpose: "This is about championing veterans in a positive way and raising resources for veterans' charities".

INNOVATIVE PREPARATIONS

Traditionally, climbers spend six to eight weeks acclimatising to Everest's extreme altitudes. To condense this timeline, the team employed a two-pronged approach, firstly using hypoxic training, which involved sleeping for several months in hypoxic tents that simulated high-altitude conditions, thus allowing their bodies to adapt to lower oxygen levels. And secondly, employing Xenon Gas Therapy, which involved the team undergoing xenon gas treatments in Germany, two weeks before departure. This experimental method is believed to stimulate the production of erythropoietin, enhancing red blood cell count and oxygen delivery.

While these techniques enabled the team to bypass traditional acclimatisation stages, they have sparked controversy within the mountaineering community. Purists argue that such methods could undermine the spirit of mountaineering.

To set this in perspective some even assert that Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing's conquering of Everest did not fall within the true spirit of

mountaineering because they used supplemental oxygen and that the first real ascent of the world's highest peak was by Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler in 1978 as they did not use supplemental oxygen at all.

Proponents, meanwhile, argue that faster ascents facilitated by the techniques deployed by Carns and his colleagues reduce environmental impact by minimising time spent on the mountain, thereby decreasing waste and strain on local resources.

THE ASCENT AND CHALLENGES FACED

Departing London on 16th May, the team reached Everest Base Camp via helicopter and commenced their ascent immediately. They summited the 8,849-meter peak on 21st May, facing formidable challenges including an avalanche on the Khumbu Icefall, extreme temperatures dropping to -35°C, and severe diarrhoea experienced by one member in the "death zone" above 8,000 meters. Despite these obstacles, the team's military training and resilience prevailed. They returned to London within the seven-day target, marking a significant achievement in high-altitude mountaineering.

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE

Individuals interested in contributing to the mission's fundraising efforts can donate through the official campaign page:

**MISSION: EVEREST
ON WWW.GIVEWHEEL.COM**

The funds will support various charities dedicated to assisting veterans and their families, including Scotty's Little Soldiers.

"We were so close to massive failure so many times. It was the hardest thing I have ever done. But we worked together and we got there."



KEVIN GODLINGTON
Entrepreneur & Former
Special Forces Soldier

"This was about TEAMWORK, TRUST, COMMUNICATION and IMPLEMENTATION. For Veterans by Veterans."



ANTHONY STAZICKER
Former Special Forces Operator
& ThruDark Co-Founder

"That was the make-or-break moment. Our success hinged on keeping the Sherpa team on side. Without them it was unsafe to continue."



GARTH MILLER
Expedition Leader
& Ex-Gurkha Officer

"The reality is if I had six to eight weeks to climb Everest, I would, but I'm a government minister and I don't have time."



ALISTAIR CARNS
Veterans Minister
& Former Royal Marines Officer



– ENTERPRISING VETERANS –

MEET BEN TIMPSON

“I met a lot of CEOs who were frustrated by a deluge of unfocused information every day. They felt it was their burden to process it all.”



Ben Timpson
The Briefing Course Leader

On the 29th March 2023 I was in the Portsmouth Travelodge reflecting on my life choices. Not an unusual activity for guests of that hotel. But I had particular reasons for introspection. In a month I would finally leave the navy after 13 years. I had no plan.

Not for lack of trying. The support from the resettlement team had been great. But none of the suggested routes felt right. Time was running out fast, and soon the journey would be about not defaulting on my mortgage rather than pursuing a new life.

Sat in that Travelodge one evening I despondently flicked through Private Eye. Towards the back an advert stopped me:

‘Got a speech coming up? I’ll write it for you!’

It was a speechwriting agency, who would apparently step in and ghostwrite anything you needed – from a TED Talk to an after dinner. It looked like fun. I’d done a number of comms jobs in the military, experiencing massive success and unmitigated disaster in the process. But regardless of the result – writing & messaging always fascinated me.

So I fired off a cold email. I’d be their new speechwriter. When do I start?

Incredibly, it worked. I received a reply from Lawrence Bernstein, who to the uninitiated is a living legend within the speechwriting world. The list of public figures he has written for is both mindboggling and highly confidential. I guarantee you have already heard his work without knowing it.

For reasons best known to him, Lawrence hired me on the spot. And so it began. TED Talks. Keynote addresses. Conference talks. Celebrity Best Man speeches. I can't reveal how – but I kept someone out of prison and helped solve a cold murder case. And ghostwrote a spiritual self-help book. I won the Cicero World Speechwriting Awards twice.

It was a ludicrous thing for an ex-sailor to be doing – and it was great. But I found that just as interesting as hammering away at a keyboard was the access it gave me to CEOs. It's an intimate thing speechwriting. You have to enter their world completely for a while and walk around in it.

That gave me one immensely valuable insight into CEOs leadership lives. It was about empathy.

In the military, we get taught a very particular kind of empathy. Upward empathy. To think about the challenge your boss is facing, and to work to put them in the best possible position to make a good decision.

After all, the military is a hierarchy. You are relying on them making the right call.

It starts with small stuff. Being on time for them. Paying full attention to their instructions. But it quickly builds into something more. Being concise and direct when providing them with information. Understanding that their attention is a finite resource not to be wasted. Putting yourself in their shoes – and asking yourself the questions they need answering.

The military train people to do that consistently. And by the time you reach a really senior leadership position, you have a whole team around you dedicated to that process. They filter and package information in a way that enables the leader to make effective decisions quickly.

What I saw in the civilian world was that didn't really exist. Or if it did, it existed by accident rather than design. I met a lot of CEOs who were frustrated by a deluge of unfocused information every day. They felt it was their burden to process it all.



I believed they could do with some military 'upwards' empathy. To give their team tools to be more concise and judicious when they spoke to them. To be that intelligent filter. So I created The Briefing Course for them.

Taking The Briefing Course from that simple insight to an actual 'thing' was not easy. I was fortunate to have help from a lot of very generous people who gave me their time and expertise.

Over the last year I have delivered it to legal firms, construction, insurance, tech giants and auditors. It works and they want more of it.

Well – so what? I felt under considerable pressure to take one of the seamless routes into the civilian world. Banking, Defence. Friends did – and they are flourishing.

But I'm glad I took the opportunity to follow my nose for a while. Stepping off the beaten path ended up taking me to the right destination. And as a wise man once said: All good things lie on the other side of risk.



FIND OUT MORE AT
www.thebriefingcourse.com

SALLY ORANGE

PUTTING BREAST CANCER IN THE LIMELIGHT

BY ALICE FARROW



Last year, Sally Orange MBE – Army veteran, record-breaking endurance athlete and mental health advocate – ran the world’s highest marathon on Mount Everest. This year, she returned to take on the challenge again, just weeks after being diagnosed with breast cancer.

Sally Orange runs marathons in costumes, often fruit-themed, as a playful nod to her surname. In the past, her colourful outfits have helped raise awareness for mental health sparking conversations and inspiring others.

In 2024, Sally ran the Everest Marathon dressed as a lemon – ice and a slice! – due to the freezing temperatures at the start. The challenge pushed her limits and although proud of completing such a difficult event, it was the heartfelt conversation with a Nepalese guide who openly shared his challenges with his mental health that she was more proud of.

‘We kept in contact over the next year and I supported him with getting the right treatment’. This encounter inspired her to return in 2025 – not just for herself, but to highlight how

connection, compassion, and mental wellbeing practices can support everyone in overcoming their own personal challenges.

With her consultant’s support, Sally was given the go-ahead to delay surgery for a few weeks so she could take on the Everest Marathon and complete filming for a documentary; an exciting project Sally is currently working on to be able to help others struggling with their mental health.

As part of the agreement, she began a course of Tamoxifen – a medication that blocks oestrogen as part of breast cancer treatment. The side effects kicked in quickly, with hot flushes and night sweats adding another layer of difficulty to an already gruelling challenge at altitude with freezing temperatures

Sally’s trek to Everest base camp took 11 days, climbing to over 5,500 metres where the air is thin and every step gets harder. She was joined by a close friend – an Atlantic rower marking three years post-bowel cancer diagnosis. When they made their initial plans, Sally had no idea she would be diagnosed with

breast cancer a matter of weeks before the trip. That added a new emotional weight to the journey – and a powerful reminder: that mental health and cancer does not discriminate and one in two people will be affected by cancer in their lifetime, and one in four by mental health struggles.

So this time, Sally chose to complete the trek to Everest Base Camp dressed as a giant breast – to raise awareness of breast cancer and the need for everyone, both men and women to check themselves regularly – before changing into a lime costume for the marathon itself. It was her 87th marathon, and the hardest yet, but she managed to complete it with her trademark zest!

Sally says ‘I felt I had my own metaphorical bra on along the way, as they there was so much ‘uplifting support’ for what I was doing from all corners of the globe’

On the morning of the race, she was battling a chest infection and diarrhoea, but still pushed through, drawing on everything she has learnt about resilience, mindfulness, meditation, visualisation, and even the simple act of focusing on the warmth of the sun or the sound of flowing rivers. Every step became a huge test, but Sally faced it all head-on – determined to finish the event.

After completing the marathon, Sally still had to trek two more days down the mountain. When a guide offered to help her with her bag, Sally – who would normally be fiercely independent – put pride aside and accepted it. It is often hard to accept help but the guide silently walked beside her. “He didn’t say a word, but he was just there – and that reminded me of living with mental health struggles. Sometimes you don’t want to be alone, but you don’t want company either. You just need someone beside you.”



“What’s particularly powerful about Sally’s story is how she has embraced vulnerability as a source of strength. By sharing her breast cancer diagnosis and treatment journey so openly online, she has not only raised awareness but also encouraged others to take action for their own health.”

What’s particularly powerful about Sally’s story is how she has embraced vulnerability as a source of strength. By sharing her breast cancer diagnosis and treatment journey so openly online, she has not only raised awareness but also encouraged others to take action for their own health. Her honesty has already had a profound impact – four women have contacted her to say that, because of her posts, they checked themselves, found lumps, and are now undergoing treatment. While their news is understandably difficult, early detection could be life-saving – showing just how important it is to talk openly about these issues.

“If something good can come from this – if people take action, if lives are saved – then it’s worth it,” she says. “It proves that even small gestures, like the event doctor offering a packet of polos during the marathon, can make a huge difference.”

She’s currently awaiting surgery and radiotherapy, but in typical Sally fashion, she’s taking it one step at a time.

“Every marathon has its barriers. This one had more than most. I’ve never cried at a finish line before – but this time, I sobbed as it had taken so much to get there

Sally is still raising funds for Breast Cancer Now and mental health charities. Donations and sponsorship opportunities are available via www.sallyorange.com.

Her incredible journey will be captured in a feature-length documentary titled *When Life Gives You Lemons... Everyone’s Everest*. The film explores not only her own physical and mental challenges, but also those of others who have shown the power of resilience, humour, and hope in the face of adversity. It also highlights a range of wellbeing practices including yoga, mindfulness and meditation. The message is simple: joy, humour and human connection can be powerful tools in the face of adversity.

To find out more or support the film, visit: www.everyoneseverest.com



To hear more of Sally’s incredible adventures, why not book her to speak at your organisation or event. Find out more at www.sallyorange.com



REMINDER TO BE BREAST AWARE

KEY FACTS AND STATS

- Around 55,000 women and 400 men are diagnosed with breast cancer every year in the UK
- Every 10 minutes, one woman is diagnosed; one man is diagnosed every day
- If nothing changes, this could rise to one woman every 8 minutes by 2040

TLC: TOUCH, LOOK, CHECK.

There’s no special way to check your breasts, and you don’t need any training. Just get to know your body.

- Touch your breasts: can you feel anything new or unusual?
- Look for changes: does anything look different?
- Check anything new or unusual with your GP

Check your whole breast area, including your armpits and up to your collarbone.

REGULAR CHECKS CAN SAVE LIVES.

You may know of some of those in need. Help us locate them.

Together we can make this a happier year for the thousands of Veterans who have failed to claim the pensions to which they are entitled. Every year, some 2,000 Armed Forces pensions go unclaimed. According to the latest AFPS Annual Report, almost 15,000 pensions in total have yet to be claimed.

The Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund (the charity arm of the Forces Pension Society) has a primary aim of providing relief for those who served in the Armed Forces and are in need by virtue of financial hardship, sickness, disability, or the effects of old age. Now we're calling on the military community, and those in the wider society, to help us ensure unclaimed pensions find their way into the hands of those who earned them; in many cases, involving substantial sums.

Why is this happening?

Armed Forces Pensions are not paid automatically. Veterans have to apply to Veterans UK using AFPS Form 8. Many have left the services without appreciating they have to make a formal application. It's a system that needs reform and we will campaign for all Veterans to be notified of their pension entitlement. But for the present, anyone serving after April 1975, now aged 60 or over, could have an Armed Forces pension if they served for two years or more.

What you can do to help

You may know some of those in need. Please consider whether there is anyone you served with or you know who might not be receiving any Armed Forces pension income. And if they aren't, please direct them to the Forces Pension Society's website using the QR code below or by visiting our special Unclaimed Pensions Help page at forcespensionsociety.org/unclaimedpensions

You can also support our campaign with a donation or via a legacy the details of which you will also find on our web page.

Unclaimed Pensions and the Armed Forces Covenant

The Government has indicated its strong support for the Armed Forces Covenant. In that spirit, we invite it to do two things: update the rules so that all Veterans, current and future are notified of their pension entitlement, and to increase their efforts to identify those who have not claimed their pension to date and endeavour to contact them.



**! Help us unite Veterans
with their pensions**



Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund

68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London SW8 1RL

T: 020 7820 9988

forcespensionsociety.org/unclaimedpensions

The FPSCF is a charity registered with the Charity Commission, charity number 264524.



British Forces Resettlement Services (BFRS) Events



At our Military to Civilian Events, BFRS offer the Armed Forces Community the chance to meet employers, find jobs, access self-employment opportunities, enrol in training schemes and get in touch with a whole raft of support services specialising in the transition from Military to Civilian life.

Entrance to events is free and each event includes a wide range of exhibitors from local and high-profile companies who actively seek to employ ex-Service personnel or offer self-employment franchise opportunities. It has been known for candidates to receive job interviews within a week of meeting an employer at one of our events.

1. QA - Project Management in Agile Environments Webinar

Date: 20 Aug 2025 11am-12pm

Type: Virtual Event

Where: Online

2. UK Power Networks - Work Experience and Skills Bootcamp

Date: 15-26 Sep 2025

Type: Industry Awareness Event

Where: TBC

3. John Deere Careers Military Insight Day

Date: 16 Sep 2025 9am-4pm

Type: Networking

Where: John Deere Harby Road, Langar, Nottingham, NG13 9HT

4. Aldershot FREE CV & Interview Skills Workshop with UK Power Networks

Date: 17 Sep 2025 2pm-4pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Garretts Club House, Queens Avenue, Aldershot, GU11 2JL

5. National Careers Fair @Aldershot

Date: 18 Sep 2025 9.30am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Aldershot Garrison Sports Centre, GU11 2LQ

6. Chevron Women Into Construction Webinar

Date: 24 Sep 2025

Type: Virtual Event

Where: Online

7. National Careers Fair @Colchester

Date: 16 Oct 2025 10am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Corporal Budd Gymnasium, CO2 9RQ

8. National Careers Fair @Catterick

Date: 20 Nov 2025 9.30am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Catterick Leisure Centre, Gough Road, Catterick, North Yorkshire, DL9 3EL

9. National Careers Fair @Tidworth

Date: 29 Jan 2026 9.30am-1.30pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Tidworth Leisure Centre, Nadder Rd, SP9 7QN

10. National Careers Fair @Catterick

Date: 12 Mar 2026 9.30am-1.30pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Catterick Leisure Centre, Gough Road, Catterick, North Yorkshire, DL9 3EL

11. National Careers Fair @Aldershot

Date: 14 May 2026 9.30am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Aldershot Garrison Sports Centre, GU11 2LQ

12. National Careers Fair @Plymouth

Date: 18 Jun 2026 10am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Crowne Plaza, Armada Way, Plymouth, PL1 2HJ

13. National Careers Fair @Stafford

Date: 9 Jul 2026 10am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Stafford County Showground, Weston Road, Stafford, ST18 0BD

14. National Careers Fair @Tidworth

Date: 17 Sep 2026 9.30am-1.30pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Tidworth Leisure Centre, Nadder Rd, SP9 7QN

15. National Careers Fair @Colchester

Date: 22 Oct 2026 10am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Tidworth Leisure Centre, Nadder Rd, SP9 7QN

16. National Careers Fair @Catterick

Date: 26 Nov 2026 9.30am-1pm

Type: Careers Fairs

Where: Catterick Leisure Centre, Gough Road, Catterick, North Yorkshire, DL9 3EL

FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.BFRSS.ORG.UK



WARRIOR WELLNESS MOVEMENT

FROM BROKEN MARINE TO WARRIOR WELLNESS MOVEMENT:
OLLIE OSBORNE'S JOURNEY FROM RUIN TO REDEMPTION

BY MIKE DAVIS-MARKS

Ollie Osborne never did things the easy way. A former elite dinghy sailor who competed with the British Olympic Sailing Team between 1998 and 2002, Ollie wasn't content with the podium alone. In 2005, chasing a deeper challenge and purpose, he joined the Royal Marines. It was the beginning of a career that would test not just his body – but his soul.

Seven years later, he transferred into the Royal Navy's Physical Training branch, where he rediscovered his competitive fire – this time, in the punishing world of high-performance indoor rowing. Despite being smaller than many of his competitors, Ollie's relentless drive saw him dominate. He clinched two national titles and represented the UK at three World Championships in Boston, Massachusetts.

In 2013, after a brutal 2km race that left him fifth behind former Olympic and World Champions, he collapsed at the finish line. Paramedics rushed in with oxygen. "That was the race where I left it all – quite literally – on the track," he later recalled. "I had nothing left to give."

But that indomitable pursuit of excellence came with a price. Years of intense physical training, deployments, and competition led to a string of serious injuries: spinal stress fractures, bilateral hip tears, and an ankle reconstruction. His body, worn and broken, could take no more.

Worse still was the emotional toll. Depression crept in. Removed from service on medical grounds, Ollie was admitted to Hasler Company, the Royal Navy's recovery centre. There, he hit rock bottom – mentally, physically, emotionally. "It was the darkest place I've ever been," he says quietly. "I wasn't just injured. I was lost."

But this is not a story about defeat. Even in his lowest moments, Ollie never gave up. Instead of walking away from the sport he loved, he began coaching the Royal Navy's Indoor Rowing Team. Despite personal despair, he led the team to exceptional success – multiple personal bests, British records, and championship medals. "Helping them find their strength helped me rediscover my own," he reflects.

That rediscovery propelled him into a new arena – professional football. Starting as a volunteer strength and conditioning coach at Plymouth Argyle FC, Ollie worked his way into the first-team dressing room, eventually securing a full-time role. "I was back in the game," he says. "It felt like everything was finally on track."

But fate struck again.

After the club's relegation, a cold, 20-second phone call ended his career in football. The fall was fast and brutal, nothing prepares you for the kind of silence that follows a call like that."

Then came the perfect storm: redundancy, financial collapse, divorce, weight gain, custody battles, eviction, and finally, the death of his father – all during the isolating grip of COVID lockdown. "That was my abyss," Ollie says, eyes fixed. "Everything I had worked for was gone."

But just when life seemed irreparably broken, something inside him clicked.

Returning from Spain after his father's funeral, Ollie made a choice. "I looked in the mirror and said, 'This is not the end of your story.'" He took a humble job in a local gym, rekindling his passion for helping others unlock their strength. And when that gym unexpectedly shut down, he didn't crumble. He built.

That was the beginning of the **Warrior Wellness Movement**.

An online health and performance coaching platform, Warrior Wellness Movement is designed to guide others – particularly veterans and professionals – back to optimal physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Built on four pillars – **Physical Strength, Mental Resilience, Nutritional Foundation, and Community Support** – the movement is more than a business. It's a mission.

"Everything I coach now is what I needed back then," Ollie explains. "This is about rising from the ashes – and taking others with you."

Backed by expert coaches in nutritional therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, Ollie and his team now support clients across the UK. Veterans, executives, and those navigating their own storms are drawn to Warrior Wellness Movement's no-nonsense, holistic approach. It's not about aesthetics or gimmicks – it's

"Ollie doesn't just train bodies – he transforms lives, he's walked the hard path. That's why his message hits home."



about rebuilding from the inside out.

"Ollie doesn't just train bodies – he transforms lives," says one client. "He's walked the hard path. That's why his message hits home."

But he wasn't done.

Ollie recently launched the *Beyond the Battlefield* podcast – a self-produced YouTube series recorded at Warrior Wellness Movement HQ in Exeter. The show gives veterans a platform to share stories of hardship, grit, and victory over adversity. "This is my way of giving back to the community that shaped me," Ollie says. "There are so many unsung heroes out there. Their stories deserve to be heard."

Each episode is designed to inspire, educate, and empower – reaching beyond the veteran community to anyone facing their own personal fight.

Today, Ollie Osborne is no longer the broken Marine. He is a warrior reborn.

And Warrior Wellness Movement isn't just a brand – it's a battle cry. A reminder that no matter how far you fall, the comeback is always stronger than the setback.

"You are never done," Ollie says. "Not if you choose to stand back up."



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AtkinsRéalis pays tribute to all who served in the Second World War on this VE Day 80th anniversary.

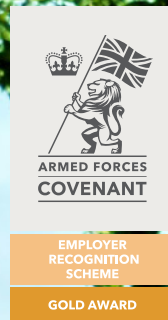
AtkinsRéalis is a world-class engineering services and nuclear organisation. Our Armed Forces community of veterans, reservists, cadet force adult volunteers, military spouses and families bring their skills and expertise to help achieve our clients goals.

Proud holders of the Ministry of Defence's Gold Employer Recognition Award, we have been a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant since 2015.



atkinsrealis.com

armedforces@atkinsrealis.com





Meet John Nicholson

Stop, Start, Continue... My Transition Story

Leaving the RAF was both the hardest and easiest decision I've ever made. A few clicks on a computer, and a 22-year career was ostensibly over. But the real challenge wasn't in the admin – it was in navigating the emotional and practical complexities of leaving behind a life of service.

Stopping Regular Service

My decision to transition wasn't due to a lack of love for the job. In the almost 22 years of service I went from Airman to Officer, achieved a raft of qualifications, and gained invaluable experiences. I was still deeply committed to my role as a Royal Air Force Officer and serving my country. But after over two decades of service, I sought new challenges and opportunities outside the familiar structure I had known.

Starting a Civilian Career

Once the decision was made, I had the usual trepidation: where will I live? who will I work for? what if it doesn't work out? – and, of course, what will I wear? A key early decision was to gain some experience prior to departure; at 40 years old, I became the work experience kid! Using my connections I secured a 4-week placement with a welcoming digital services company. They took me in for the month, I worked on a couple of projects and networked around the organisation allowing me to try out my future life. I learnt what I had in store, and it filled me full of confidence and excitement – I now felt ready for what comes next. At the end of the placement, I interviewed for a role, and was successful; although ultimately I turned it down, I then learned that this was fine and normal, another valuable lesson.

I made the decision to join AtkinsRéalis, based on my research I noted they provided a supportive environment that understood Service Leavers. They were a soft landing, allowing me to gradually adjust to civilian life. Nonetheless, the transition wasn't without its challenges. I often found myself missing the structure and camaraderie of the Armed Forces. However, with the unwavering support of my wife, friends, and new colleagues, I found my footing and began to thrive in my new role. Today, I lead a team of Digital Strategy Consultants and have been involved in significant civil nuclear and defence engineering projects. It's been an enriching experience, full of learning and growth.

Transitioning to a civilian career meant applying the skills and values I honed in the RAF in new contexts. Leadership, resilience, and adaptability proved invaluable. AtkinsRéalis not only offered me a job but also a platform for growth, making the transition smoother.

Continuing Service

Despite leaving regular service, my commitment to the RAF never wavered. I transitioned into the RAF Reserves, where I now lead a small consultancy team of Digital Reservists. This role allows me to continue serving while embracing new challenges in my new employment. Within a year, I was promoted, and I find immense pride in my role as a Reservist. The support from my employer has been crucial, as a Gold Award holder in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme AtkinsRéalis give me 10 extra days of leave and other support enabling me to balance my civilian career and military

“Transitioning isn't about closing a chapter; it's about evolving and embracing new possibilities. The uniform may now be part-time, but the pride and dedication remain full-time.”

commitments effectively. This was another factor for making my decision on which company to join on leaving regular service.

Looking Back (and Forward)

The past three years have been an incredible journey. While I may have stopped my Regular Service, I've started a fulfilling new career and continued my service in a meaningful way. Additionally, serving in the RAF Reserves has given me reach back into a bit of familiarity at those times when I needed it. Transitioning isn't about closing a chapter; it's about evolving and embracing new possibilities. The uniform may now be part-time, but the pride and dedication remain full-time.

If you're thinking about leaving, my advice is simple: plan early, test things out, and don't be afraid to ask for help – the next chapter might just be your best one yet.

 **AtkinsRéalis**



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

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Sir Andrew Gregory

A Life of Service: From Army Command to Championing Veterans

BY ALICE FARROW

When Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Gregory was considering a career having secured a place to read engineering at Cambridge university, his college was happy to accept him but wanted him to gain some experience of engineering. That led him to joining a graduate training scheme with Metal Box Ltd. Having finished his degree, he thought of joining the Army but Metal Box suggested he get his foot on the industry ladder and 'if he still wanted to go and play soldiers, do it in a couple of years time', so he became a shift foreman in a factory in Hull making paint cans. But the pull of services remained strong. "In 1981, I applied to join the Army for three years... and I stayed for thirty-five."



Pride in People

Despite the accolades, it is a quiet moment early in his career that Sir Andrew remembers with the most pride. "I was a young lieutenant, learning my trade – and frankly, I wasn't very good at it. One evening I was in my room after dinner, sorting my kit, when there was a knock on the door."

It was a young gunner from his troop, who had walked several hundred yards from his accommodation to speak to him. "His mother had just been diagnosed with cancer. The fact he came to me meant I was someone he trusted. That moment, even now, means a great deal."

Leadership, for Sir Andrew, has always been about people – supporting them in their best moments and their worst. "As a battery commander, one of my soldiers died tragically, in a motorbike accident on his way home. I remember visiting his family, in Birmingham who, despite the devastating news, were so dignified and engaging. It's in those moments that the human side of command really matters."

A Second Chapter in Service

Sir Andrew left the Army at 58, having served as Chief of Defence People (CDP) – a role which allowed him to remain in service beyond the typical retirement age. "I still felt young, and I believed I had more to give. My entire career has really been about two things: service and leadership."

Shortly after leaving the Army, during a holiday with his wife Sally, he received a call from Air Vice Marshal David Murray, the then CEO of SSAFA,

"I still felt young, and I believed I had more to give. My entire career has really been about two things: service and leadership."

who mentioned he was moving on and that Sir Andrew should consider SSAFA. "It was a perfect fit. The values, the leadership, the focus on people – it all aligned with what I believed in."

His 8½ years at the helm of SSAFA were, in his words, "a privilege and a pleasure." Under his leadership, the charity remained rooted in its core values and acted through its BRAVE standards, namely Beneficiary focused, Respectful, Adaptable, Valuing inclusivity and diversity and showing Excellence in everything. The support provided to over 50,000 members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families through the combined efforts of around 350 staff and 2,500 volunteers is a source of great pride.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

One of Sir Andrew's key concerns today is to ensure the national narrative around veterans changes. "There's this perception that veterans are mad, sad, or bad – in prison, homeless, or struggling with PTSD. But of the 15,000 who leave each year, the vast majority are better for their service and go on to be excellent employees."

The real challenge, he says, is reaching those who slip through the cracks. "Some don't want to keep in touch when they leave. But if problems build up, they can find themselves in



crisis. It's those people we need to support before they find themselves in crisis."

He's also candid about the limits of government support. "There is statutory provision, yes. But the key is the fusion of that with charitable activities; that is how the best effect will be achieved. And the military charity sector is more coordinated than many realise; large and small charities really do work together for the sake of those who need some assistance."

A Life Rooted in Tradition

Sir Andrew's dedication to service is deeply personal. His family has served in every generation since the Crimean War. "My great-grandfather had three sons; two died in the Great War and my grandfather, who came out of retirement to be a Convoy Commodore was lost at sea at the beginning of 1943."

The recent VE Day 80 commemorations hold particular meaning; Sir Andrew's father, Captain Dick Gregory of the 7th Field Regiment Royal Artillery, landed on Sword Beach on D-Day. His tank was destroyed that evening, he was badly wounded and evacuated back to England that very night. He would go on to spend nearly two years recovering from his injuries.

Meanwhile, Sir Andrew's mother, Alison Egerton, was in the Map Room at Southwick House, General Eisenhower's headquarters near Portsmouth. She was tracking the movements of the invasion fleet across a massive map board – unaware that one of the markers represented the man who would later become her husband.

Duty first

There was a stunned silence in the Good Morning Britain studio when, the day after Queen Elizabeth's funeral, during an interview, Sir Andrew told Suzanna Reid that it had also been his father-in-law's funeral.

But he had spoken to his wife when the date came through and they had agreed that he should do his duty as Master Gunner and attend Her Majesty's funeral.

During the interview he commented: "I am also Chief Executive of the Soldiers' Sailors Airmen and Families Association, SSAFA, and this reminds me of the sacrifices all serving personnel and their families have to make.

"What yesterday and my decision made me reflect on is what all military families go through; where we frequently miss Christmases birthdays, adversaries and more. You cannot turn duty and service on and off at will. I did my duty yesterday. I was very honoured to do my duty, but it wasn't easy."



Even after leaving SSAFA in February, Sir Andrew remains as busy as ever – he holds the position of Master Gunner, St James's Park, serving the head of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and represents their Captain General, His Majesty King Charles III. He is also a school governor, Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Patron of Fighting With Pride, supporting LGBT+ veterans dismissed under historic policies and trustee of a number of other charities

"And I try to play golf – though it hasn't improved much, no time!" he jokes.

Looking to the Future

Sir Andrew is optimistic about public sentiment. "VE Day 80 was heartening – people came out to honour the few remaining World War Two veterans. That pride must extend to all who serve."

From Northern Ireland to Afghanistan, Sir Andrew Gregory has spent a lifetime in service. "For me," he reflects, "it's always been about duty – and I've been lucky to carry that forward into civilian life."

"His 8½ years at the helm of SSAFA were, in his words, a privilege and a pleasure. Under his leadership, the charity remained rooted in its core values and acted through its BRAVE standards, namely Beneficiary focused, Respectful, Adaptable, Valuing inclusivity and diversity and showing Excellence in everything."

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"Of all the
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faces grim
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done in the
nevertheless
surpasses you

SIR WINSTON

– A VETERAN'S VIEW FROM THE BOARDROOM –

Why Military Minds Thrive in Business

Veteran submariner **Commodore Doug Littlejohns CBE**, exemplifies the power of resilience and leadership in service and beyond. A Cold War Royal Navy officer trained under the gruelling “Perisher” course, Littlejohns described the subs he led as tests of endurance and calm under pressure. Mike Davis-Marks reports...

Doug Littlejohns served in the Royal Navy for three decades, commanding diesel and nuclear submarines, an anti-submarine frigate, and later running the Royal Naval Engineering College in Plymouth. Upon retirement, he faced a now-familiar challenge – civilian employers doubting the suitability of military leaders in business.

“There is still a belief in many quarters that people like us are either dumb sheep to be herded, or that we have a red-faced, shouty management style,” he wrote candidly.

Opting for an MBA over the Royal College of Defence Studies, Littlejohns discovered he already had practical experience in most of the course content – except, perhaps, double-entry bookkeeping.

“What we do in the services – strategy, tactics, people management, project delivery – is exactly what business does, just with different names,” he explained.

His first civilian job, however, was a culture shock. “I was appalled by the ‘me-me’ culture, political backstabbing and hoarding of information,” he recalled. “Teamwork and shared goals were almost non-existent.”

Redemption came in the unlikelyst form: video games. Littlejohns co-founded Red Storm Entertainment with author Tom Clancy – an American firm that grew from 17 to 108 employees with an \$80 million turnover in just four years.

He met Tom following the success of Hunt for Red October and the two became firm friends which led to Littlejohns becoming Tom’s best

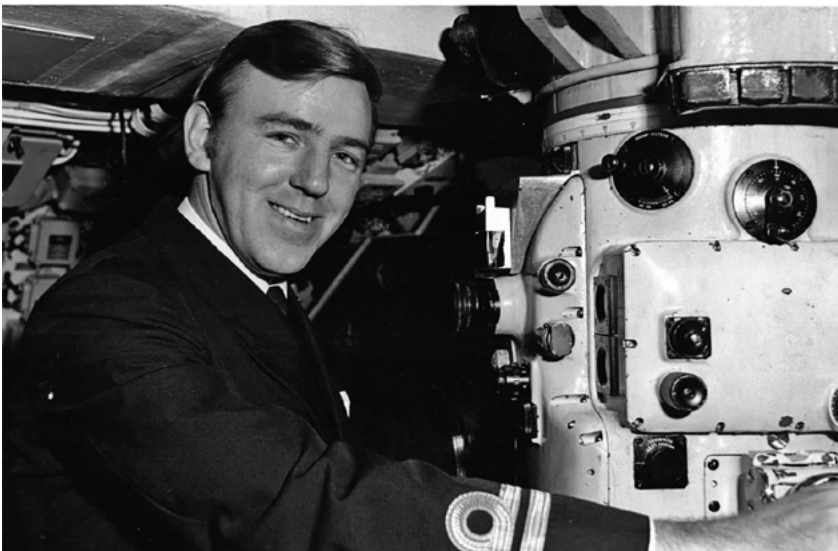
man at his wedding in 1999. “Tom was a firm believer in leadership over management and he told me I was his only real choice,” Littlejohns recalled in an interview, “he trusted my leadership, not just my naval record.”

When asked by Forbes how a British submarine captain could lead a U.S. tech company, he quipped, “I ran it like a submarine – and the employees seemed to like that.”

For Doug Littlejohns, military veterans are an undervalued asset in the civilian world.

“We’re intelligent, well-trained, focused, resilient, team-orientated and loyal to an employer who is loyal to us.”

Littlejohns offers timeless advice: “In conflict zones or corporate boardrooms, the lessons are the same – leadership of people, not ego.”



“What we do in the services – strategy, tactics, people management, project delivery – is exactly what business does, just with different names.”



PAUL MATSON - HULL 4 HEROES FROM STRUGGLE TO STRENGTH

By Alan Spence

Hull 4 Heroes, a military charity that provides a wide range of services to ease the transition of ex-service personnel into civilian life, owes its existence and achievements to the deeply personal journey of its founder, Paul Matson.

After serving in the Royal Artillery in the '80s, Paul experienced firsthand how tough it can be to adapt to life outside the military.

"I was determined to make it smoother for others after what I went through," says Paul. "I suppose I was turning pain into purpose".

Growing up in Hull, Paul faced an unstable and difficult childhood. Joining the Army offered him not just a career, but a sense of structure, purpose, and belonging, things that many service personnel come to rely on. Leaving the

forces, however, returned him to the city where life had once gone wrong, and the transition hit hard.

Without the structure of Army life, he struggled with drink and drugs, and even contemplated suicide. But after reaching out for help, Paul turned his life around, eventually building a successful construction business.

Inspired by his experience volunteering on the BBC's DIY SOS: Big Build Homes for Veterans project, where a street in Manchester was transformed into homes for ex-service personnel, Paul decided to act.

In 2016, with the support of fellow veterans, he founded Hull 4 Heroes, with a clear mission: to provide both practical and emotional support to veterans adjusting to civilian life.

Hull 4 Heroes offers a wide range of services tailored to each individual's needs:

- **Help finding employment**
- **Support with housing and accommodation**
- **Financial advice and guidance**
- **Mental health and wellbeing referrals**
- **Most importantly, creating a community where veterans regain a sense of belonging.**

What makes Hull 4 Heroes stand apart from many national military charities is its grassroots, local delivery model. Based in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire, services are delivered by people who know the local community, and are known by those they help.



“The beneficiaries are not case book numbers, but known members of the local community,” says Paul.

“When people donate or help in some way, they know they’re helping veterans locally, and at the same time, supporting their own community,” he explains.

Because Hull 4 Heroes is so deeply rooted in the area, the charity can often spot emerging needs before they escalate. For example, if a veteran is suddenly made homeless due to eviction or family breakdown, Hull 4 Heroes can step in immediately – arranging emergency accommodation, connecting them with mental health support, and working with local employers to help them back into work before they fall through the cracks.

The charity’s hard work has not gone unnoticed. In February 2025, Veterans Minister Alistair Carns DSO OBE MC MP, a former Royal Marines Commando, visited Hull 4 Heroes. After touring the facilities, the Minister described the work done by Hull 4 Heroes as ‘A grade’.

He added that, following a tour of various veteran-supporting schemes across the country, he has “seen exactly how it should be done at Hull 4 Heroes’.

Carns also praised Matson’s “exceptional leadership” ... for the support given to veterans in Hull and the East Riding.”

Thanks to Paul’s determination and the tireless efforts of his team, Hull 4 Heroes has transformed many lives.



“Thanks to Paul’s determination and the tireless efforts of his team, Hull 4 Heroes has transformed many lives.”

At the heart of everything Hull 4 Heroes does is a deep commitment to teamwork. Paul always insists that the charity’s success in helping veterans who once felt abandoned and hopeless to find stability, purpose, and new beginnings is not down to one person, but to the collective efforts of an incredible team.

“It’s not just me, this is a team I’m proud to be part of,” he says. Reflecting that spirit, every one of Paul’s social media posts proudly ends with the hashtag #Strongertogether.

Paul’s personal story is the beating heart of Hull 4 Heroes. It proves why such support is so desperately needed, and why Hull 4 Heroes remains a lifeline for so many.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE
FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.hull4heroes.org.uk

Still hope for some form of Veterans’ Village project?

Hull 4 Heroes’ most ambitious vision to date has been the creation of a Veterans’ Village – a purpose-built community offering homes, support services, and a safe, understanding environment for those leaving the forces.

However, in July, Paul announced that the project has been paused. While rising costs played a part, the decision was ultimately an operational one. With the needs of veterans growing more urgent, the charity made the call to focus its time, energy, and resources on supporting those who need help right now.

The changing face of the military also played a role. With fewer armed forces personnel, more people joining later in life, and many leaving earlier the way we support veterans must evolve too. Hull 4 Heroes remains committed to its mission, just with a sharper focus on the present.

The decision to pause the Veterans’ Village project wasn’t taken lightly. After many sleepless nights, Paul brought the matter to the trustees, and after careful discussion, they collectively agreed it was the right move at this time. While Paul admits to being “totally gutted,” he remains confident that focusing on the immediate needs of veterans is the right call.

Importantly, those who contributed financially to the Village project haven’t lost their support. All funds were held separately, and donors have been given the choice to either have their contributions returned or redirected to Hull 4 Heroes’ ongoing work, such as the growing programme of housing refurbishments across Hull to provide safe, stable accommodation for veterans.

So, is that the last we’ll hear of the Veterans’ Village?

“Never say never,” says Paul. “The idea is still very much alive; it just might take a different shape. What’s probably needed is a model that supports veterans in the here and now, helps prevent future struggles, and makes the transition into civilian life smoother and more connected. It’s about integration, not segregation, and doing it in a way that builds community spirit and relies on teamwork, not isolation.”

He adds, “That’s a conversation for another time. Right now, our focus is where it needs to be on the veterans and their families who need us today.”





AtkinsRéalis' Reservist Recruitment Fair in 2024.

A Year in the Life of an Armed Forces Champion

By Alistair Roxburgh, Armed Forces Champion at AtkinsRéalis

At AtkinsRéalis, I have the privilege of serving as the Armed Forces Champion, supporting and celebrating our Armed Forces community. From veterans and reservists to cadet force adult volunteers and military families, my year is filled with meaningful initiatives that reflect our unwavering commitment to those who serve or have served. I'm fortunate to have a programme manager who supports in the many tasks we tackle.

In January, I begin by reflecting on the past year and planning our objectives for the year ahead. It's a time to consolidate lessons learned and set a clear path forward for the year. We successfully influence the company's data capture processes to ensure we can track armed forces community members from their first contact before recruitment to the end of their time with us.

February is all about recognition. I encourage nominations for the Ex-Forces in Business Awards, ensuring our talented veterans and reservists receive the spotlight they deserve.

March sees me working on our submission for the Top 50 Great British Employers of Veterans. It's a chance to showcase how AtkinsRéalis fosters an inclusive and veteran-friendly culture.

In April, I develop a new guidance document for line managers. This resource shares best practice for supporting colleagues from the Armed Forces community, helping to build understanding and inclusivity. With a Human Resources representative, we also update our Reservist Procedure to ensure we look after them to the best of our ability.

May is a month of collaboration. I attend a BuildForce Military Insight Day, representing AtkinsRéalis alongside our ambassadors. I also work with Salute

"June is one of the highlights of the year – Armed Forces Week, when we honour the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces community."

My Job on the Measuring Social Value initiative to better understand our Armed Forces community's social value impact.

June is one of the highlights of the year – Armed Forces Week, when we honour the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces community. On the Monday, we sponsor the SSAFA Reservist Reception at the Honourable Artillery Company. One of our reservists shares his story, highlighting the resilience, leadership, and adaptability that reservists bring to the workplace.

Wednesday is Reserves Day, when many of our reservist colleagues wear their uniforms to work, sparking conversations about their dual roles. We host SSAFA Big Brew Up events in some of our offices raising £500 for the charity. I also help run a joint workshop with one of our divisions and the Forces Employment Charity on 'Why Military is Good for Business' and how to ensure the recruitment teams know how to review veterans' CVs with more understanding.

Thursday is the Forces Friendly Employers Best Practice Forum, when I present our Partnering with the Armed Forces (PwAF) programme and discuss our social value using a new Covenant Social Value Framework. That evening, we celebrate our shortlisted candidates for the Ex-Forces in Business Awards and hope we win in one of the categories!

On Saturday, Armed Forces Day, I encourage everyone to participate in local events – whether it's attending a parade, supporting a fundraiser, or simply thanking a veteran.

After a busy June, I update senior leaders at a Programme Board in July as well as review CVs and advise a potential reservist on how to join one of the Armed Forces.

September takes me to a Careers Training Partnership fair, where I join two veterans at our company stand to talk with around 25 Service leavers exploring second careers.

In October, I help run a reservist recruitment fair in Bristol and chair the regional Gold Award Association group, continuing our outreach efforts to the growing Gold community.

November is marked by remembrance, our other key moment of the year. I host a company-wide Remembrance Day webinar, which draws 150 attendees and honours those who served and gave their lives in service to our country.

Finally, in December, I reflect on the year's achievements and assess the benefits delivered to our Armed Forces community.

"AtkinsRéalis remains steadfast in its commitment to being a Forces-friendly employer. Through advocacy, engagement, and celebration, I'm proud to help build a workplace where military experience is valued and supported – every month of the year."



Alistair Roxburgh

Principal Consultant and Armed Forces Champion at AtkinsRéalis



AtkinsRéalis' armed forces community enjoying the Ex Forces in Business Awards in 2024.



AtkinsRéalis supporting the SSAFA Big Brew Up.



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

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Meet Cal White

From Service to Business

I studied Mechanical Engineering at the University of Birmingham. I'm not a natural engineering talent, and certainly not an intellect. My route to engineering was a means to an end; an Army sponsorship that granted a place at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

My career was relatively brief; but fulfilling & tremendous fun. I commissioned into the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, before specialising as an aviation engineer & serving on operational engineering duties with the aircraft reconnaissance force.

It was during this time, that my passion for engineering developed. I began to understand the impact innovation could have on the world around us.

Like a lot of Veterans, serving remains my biggest privilege; a sense of duty, compounded with the opportunity to lead some of the best people in our country.

Entering the Corporate Arena

My first role in industry, was not Defence. I joined a tremendous team with General Electric Aviation (now GE Aerospace); programme delivery, commercial support & government affairs in commercial aerospace. Supporting aircraft leasing & airline customers showed me the dynamism of the commercial world. It became a robust proving ground of my ability to learn fast; competitive pricing, asset depreciation, financial risk, credit etc were all new concepts. All things wholly alien to most service leavers.

“Like a lot of Veterans, serving remains my biggest privilege; a sense of duty, compounded with the opportunity to lead some of the best people in our country.”

I then moved back into Defence with two roles at QinetiQ & Lockheed Martin. Both offered the opportunity to get back into Defence Procurement with a fresh perspective.

In my recent move, I have fulfilled a long term aspiration to move into business development. At Leonardo, I'm now involved in the growth of our digital services offering for Defence and Security customers. This chapter is focused on digital services, software architecture, PaaS, Artificial Intelligence, & digital twins.

Whilst my engineering & programme delivery experience have inevitably helped, I don't credit my career journey solely on my technical background. The ability to learn, to “keep-up”, to have a vision on the future whilst maintaining your values and standards become the core of business leadership.

Leaving your rank at the gate

I have seen this done really well. I have also seen this done really poorly. As an observer, those who succeed in industry, do so with humility. It is also imperative not to mentally limit yourself because of the rank you left at. Industry is rank-agnostic. You'll be successful because of your ability to perform, build relationships & innovate.



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

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TURNING CHALLENGE INTO A MOVEMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN THE ROYAL NAVY



When Lt Commander Hugo Mitchell-Heggs first encountered the armed forces, it wasn't through recruitment or training – it was through family.

"There was definitely a family connection," he recalls. "Growing up in France, surrounded by family members who had been through the wars, attending big remembrance events... meeting WWI veterans. That left a huge impression."

The sense of respect and admiration for the military was deeply ingrained in his upbringing. "They were fantastic people – celebrated and honoured. My cousin was a Gurkha officer in the 90s, and he had this incredible life – jungle, mountains, adventure. I followed his journey from afar and thought, 'That's what I want.'"

That pull towards a life of adventure, leadership, and service was clear early on. Hugo joined the Army Cadets at 13. "I loved it – sports, adventure, leadership. By 16, I was already thinking about my career." At 19, he applied to join the Army, even receiving sponsorship offers from the Gurkhas and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME).

Then, fate intervened.

"I found myself doing a master's in mechanical engineering, and I met a Royal Navy recruiter. Suddenly, everything fell into place and the Navy made sense – I could combine engineering and adventure, and see the world."

Initially training to become a Marine Engineering Officer, Hugo's journey took a sharp turn at Britannia Royal Naval College. "They were short of submariners. I didn't know much about submarines, but I met a few Upper Yardsmen (those who had gone through the ranks to commission) – amazing people. Really lovely blokes. They painted such a great picture. I volunteered. The rest is history."

True to form, Hugo doesn't stick to rigid plans "I don't set strict goals," he explains. "Sometimes things just unfold in unexpected ways – it felt like the path revealed itself." That same mindset led him toward one of his most unexpected and impactful adventures.

THE BIRTH OF HMS OARDACIOUS

Nine years into his naval career, Hugo found himself off on dry land – and injured. "I had to stop playing rugby, which I was devoted to and left a huge void in my life. Around the same time, I discovered ocean rowing; the beginnings of an idea stuck in my head for two months. I just couldn't let it go."

The idea: row across the Atlantic. No Royal Navy team had ever done it. "The Army was always ahead in terms of big expeditions – there was a cultural gap. So I thought: let's build a campaign and make this happen."

That campaign became **HMS Oardacious**, born from both passion and purpose. "I assembled a team which included Lt Commander Callum Fraser a Weapon Engineer Officer; who was there from the very beginning, we met playing rugby and in the general Submariner/Clyde ecosystem. We built HMS Oardacious from the ground up together.



"We were then joined by Petty Officer Dylan Woods a Marine Engineer Submariner and Leading Engineer Technician Matt Harvey a Comms Info Specialist Submariner who became good friends. We quickly realised we'd need sponsorship, a PR strategy, fundraising... but more importantly, we needed and wanted to make an impact."

From the start, in January 2020, mental health was at the core. "Members of the team had all seen people struggle. Unless you had complex PTSD, there wasn't much awareness or obvious route to support. Even the third sector was still catching up."

"It was a natural fit, we were talking to Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) about becoming a fund within the charity. At the time they were focused on well-being but didn't have a major mental health theme. It was the perfect time to collaborate. We could build the identity of Oardacious with them."

The timing was uncanny. Over 50 corporate sponsors joined early on, many keen to tackle mental health in the workplace. "They all had the same challenges – how do you talk about it? What's best practice? It was a perfect storm of purpose and momentum."

Originally, it was meant to be a one-off. "We even had a buyer lined up for the boat. But then came March 2020."

WHEN THE WORLD CHANGED, SO DID THE MISSION

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted everything. Suddenly, Hugo's voice and experience – as a submariner used to isolation – were in high demand.

"When Covid hit, Commodore Jim Perks, the then head of the Submarine Service, said, 'I've got a guy who's been telling the mental health story – get him out there.' Next thing I know, I'm on Sky News, doing 80 virtual talks. One of them had 50,000 people on the call!"

The demand was clear. Oardacious wasn't finished. It had just begun.

With backing from major defence companies like **Babcock**, **BAE Systems**, and **Rolls-Royce**, the campaign found its second wind. "We built an outreach team – worked with Sea Cadets, created STEM programmes, even launched our own Oardacious Fund to provide grants."



What started as a rowing challenge became a storytelling platform, a youth engagement programme, a mental resilience movement. "It was the tip of the iceberg," Hugo says. "Below that, we were delivering real impact."

ENDURING IMPACT AND GROWING LEGACY

Since it was founded, 15 Royal Navy personnel have rowed oceans with HMS Oardacious. "Each tells a story about resilience and leadership," Hugo reflects. "It's an entrepreneurial, creative way of showing the RN brand and the people behind it."

In 2024, the **Valkyries Campaign** – a female-led expedition – added new dimensions of inclusivity and representation. "It told a different story – gender equality, women in defence. We kept the core themes, but gave them a new voice, hitting new audiences."

The campaign's structure remains fluid and volunteer-led. "The team grows, shrinks, grows again – everyone's doing their day jobs. But the network is enduring. Some years will be quiet. Others, incredibly busy."



Even now, Hugo sees more ahead: "Oardacious should be an enduring organisation – rowing, cycling, whatever challenges come next. It's about creating partnerships, inspiring growth, and showing the world what Royal Navy people are made of."

"Every rower comes back changed. Better. You learn extraordinary depths of resilience, which is a hugely powerful story."

And while Hugo may not be leaving the Navy just yet, his commitment to the long-term vision of Oardacious already has a huge legacy.

To find out more about HMS Oardacious visit: www.hmsoardacious.com

HMS Oardacious is a fund managed by Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity www.RNRMC.org.uk





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Veterans' Services Benefits and Discounts

Veterans in the UK have access to a wide range of services aimed at supporting their health, wellbeing, education, employment, and overall quality of life. On the following pages you can find a comprehensive list of services available to veterans.

Healthcare Services

Veterans who have served in the UK Armed Forces are entitled to priority NHS healthcare for service-related conditions. Additionally, **Veteran Aware** is a new accreditation scheme set up by the **Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA)** to improve the healthcare provision for veterans. If they live in Greater London, they may also be eligible for help through the **Veterans UK Mental Health and Wellbeing Service**, also known as **Op Courage**. This includes access to counselling, therapy, and other support services.

NHS Veterans' Mental Health Services

Tailored mental health support through programs like the **Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)**, and the **Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS)**.

Op COURAGE

The NHS service providing specialist care and support for veterans with mental health conditions, including therapy and psychiatric care.

Priority Treatment in the NHS

Veterans are entitled to priority treatment for conditions related to their service, as long as it does not impact the clinical need of others.

Prosthetics and Mobility Support

Veterans with amputations or mobility issues have access to specialist prosthetic services.

Lady Grover's Fund

Affordable healthcare cover for serving and former officers' families.

www.ladygrover.org.uk

Useful links

Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance

www.veteranaware.nhs.uk

List of Veteran Aware NHS Trusts

[www.england.nhs.uk/
personalisedcare/ipc-for-veterans/
veteran-aware-nhs-trusts](http://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/ipc-for-veterans/veteran-aware-nhs-trusts)

Op Courage

www.londonveteranservice.nhs.uk

Financial Services

Veterans who are struggling financially may be eligible for financial support through the **Veterans Welfare Service**. This includes help with debt management, budgeting, and accessing benefits. Financial help is also available through a range of different sources. Some options include:

Veterans' Welfare Service (VWS): The VWS is a government-funded service providing a range of welfare support to veterans, including financial advice and assistance with benefits claims. www.gov.uk/guidance/veterans-welfare-service

Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)

This is a government-funded scheme that provides financial compensation to veterans who have been injured or disabled as a result of their service. Eligibility for AFCS is determined on a case-by-case basis. www.gov.uk/guidance/armed-forces-compensation-scheme-afcs

War Pension Scheme

This is another government-funded scheme that provides pensions to veterans who have been injured or disabled as a result of their service. Like AFCS, eligibility is determined on a case-by-case basis. www.gov.uk/guidance/war-pension-scheme-wps

The Royal British Legion (RBL)

The RBL can provide financial assistance. Including grants to help with housing costs, household bills, and essential items. www.britishlegion.org.uk

Help for Heroes

This charity provides support to wounded, injured and sick veterans, including financial assistance to help with things like housing costs, household bills, and education or training. www.helpforheroes.org.uk

Seafarers UK

This charity provides financial support to veterans who have served in the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Merchant Navy, or fishing fleets. www.theseafarerscharity.org

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Rockbridge aims to help you make good decisions about your money and provide clear information to help you achieve your financial goals using a proven 4-step process to establish your needs and provide you with tailored advice that is personal and specific to you.

www.rockbridgefinancial.co.uk

Pension Services

Veterans who have served for a minimum of 22 years may be eligible for a pension from the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. Veterans can contact the Joint Personnel Administration Centre at Veterans UK on **0800 085 3600** for information about their Armed Forces pension or for advice through the Forces Pension Society (membership fee required).

War Pension Scheme (WPS)

A compensation scheme for those injured or disabled through service before April 6, 2005. www.gov.uk/guidance/war-pension-scheme-wps

Forces Pension Society

The Forces Pension Society is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that acts as a pension watchdog for the entire military community. The Society empowers its members to make better, well-informed choices about their Armed Forces Pension and provides members of the Armed Forces Pension Schemes and their partners with personalised pension guidance. www.forcespensionsociety.org

Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)

Provides compensation for any injury, illness, or death which occurred on or after April 6, 2005. www.gov.uk/guidance/armed-forces-compensation-scheme-afcs

Veterans UK

Offers help with pensions, allowances, and compensation claims. www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk

Service Pensions

Regular pensions for veterans with a long military career.

Will Writing Services

Royal Star & Garter

RS&G offer a free will writing service to Veterans. There is no obligation to include a donation to the charity, which specialises in elderly dementia and disability care to veterans and their partners, although one is always welcome. www.starandgarter.org

Useful links

Forces Pension Society
www.forcespensionsociety.org

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Combat Stress

A UK charity that provides mental health support for veterans struggling with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and related issues. www.combatstress.org.uk

Company of Makers CIC

Through podcasts, talks and workshops, Company of Makers exists to support Veterans who are struggling on civvy street no matter how long ago they left the Armed Forces. The name derives from their making workshops, which help with the adjustment to civvy street, teach new skills, build confidence and assist those entering the world of work. Currently running a gaming project reaching younger veterans from recent campaigns. www.companyofmakers.com

Help for Heroes

Offers recovery services for physical and mental health, wellbeing programs, and financial assistance. www.helpforheroes.org.uk

Walking With The Wounded

Provides mental health support, therapy, and programs to help veterans with life skills and resilience. www.walkingwiththewounded.org.uk

Big White Wall (Now Togetherall)

An online mental health service that provides a safe space for veterans to express their feelings and get support. www.togetherall.com



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Registered charity No. 266982

Employment and Training Services

There are a plethora of organisations that can help Veterans find a job. For those within 2 years of leaving and for 2 years after, the MOD provides a resettlement service through the **Career Transition Partnership (CTP)**, though this is not available to all Veterans. Providing an employment service for all Veterans is the **Forces Employment Charity (FEC)**, as does the **British Forces Resettlement Service (BFRS)**. Other Service charities also offer employment advice and help with job search including **SSAFA**, **RBL**, and **The White Ensign Association (WEA)**. There are a large number of private limited companies and community interest companies (CICs) that also offer support. It should be noted that some of these may also charge a fee.

Career Transition Partnership (CTP)
Offers resettlement services, including career advice, CV workshops, and job placement services for those leaving the military.
www.modctp.co.uk

The Forces Employment Charity
Provides tailored support to veterans to help them find work after leaving the military.
www.forcesemployment.org.uk

Forces Families Jobs
A job search platform for veterans and military families.
www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA)
Supports veterans in transitioning to healthcare careers.
www.veteranaware.nhs.uk

Skills Development Scotland
Helps veterans with retraining and gaining qualifications to transition into civilian careers.
www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

University of Lincoln Military Programmes
Lincoln University is the academic partner of the Royal Navy's Selborne programme, but offers a range of other military programmes for serving and retired armed forces personnel from all three Services.
www.lincoln.ac.uk/lbs/militaryprogrammes

TechVets

TechVets are a Forces Employment Charity funded programme that provides cyber and digital skills training for veterans. With a growing digital skills shortage in the UK, the training, mindset, adaptability and security backgrounds of many veterans make them ideal candidates for this sector.
www.techvets.co

Salute My Job
SMJ also runs a cyber security skills training programme in collaboration with IBM.
www.salutemyjob.com

City & Guilds

City & Guilds partners with education providers, employers, and governments worldwide to deliver high-quality skills development that transforms lives, industries, and economies. Our comprehensive suite of trusted training and development solutions - including qualifications, apprenticeships, and digital credentials - empowers workforces across more than 28 industries, ensuring proven outcomes for today's needs and tomorrow's challenges.
www.cityandguilds.com

Useful links

Career Transition Partnership
www.modctp.co.uk

Forces Employment Charity
www.forcesemployment.org.uk

BFRS
www.bfrss.org.uk

SSAFA
www.ssafa.org.uk

The Royal British Legion
www.britishlegion.org.uk

The White Ensign Association
www.whiteensign.co.uk

The List
www.thelistuk.com

X Forces Enterprise
www.x-forces.com

Forces Select
www.forceselect.com

Veterans' Gateway
www.veteransgateway.org.uk

Salute My Job
www.salutemyjob.com

Housing and Homelessness Support

Veterans who need housing may be eligible for assistance through a variety of public and private organisations. This includes help with finding suitable accommodation, advice on buying or renting a home, and information on housing benefits.

Stoll

Provides housing and support services to vulnerable veterans and those at risk of homelessness.
www.stoll.org.uk

Veterans' Gateway

A first point of contact for housing advice and support for veterans.
www.veteransgateway.org.uk

Haig Housing

Provides housing assistance and homes for veterans and their families.
www.haighousing.org.uk

Alabaré Homes for Veterans

Offers accommodation and support for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
www.alabare.co.uk

Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI)

Based in Aylesford, Kent, RBLI runs a village for 350 Veterans, who are homeless or in need of housing.
www.rbli.co.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

Offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free.
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Family and Community Support

SSAFA

Provides lifelong support to veterans and their families, including practical, emotional, and financial help.
www.ssafa.org.uk

The Royal British Legion

Offers practical advice, financial aid, and emotional support to veterans and their families.
www.britishlegion.org.uk

The Poppy Factory

Supports veterans with disabilities and health conditions into meaningful employment.
www.poppyfactory.org

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**Forces
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Charity

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ABF The Soldiers' Charity

Provides financial support to soldiers, veterans, and their families in need.
www.armybenevolentfund.org

The Veterans Welfare Service (VWS)

Provides a professional help and advice service to veterans or anyone supporting a veteran, their families and dependents.
www.gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service

Legal and Advocacy Services

Irwin Mitchell

Irwin Mitchell is a full service law firm, who, through a dedicated team of experts offer a full range of legal and financial services, including specialist legal support and advocacy, tailored to the needs of current and former service personnel, as well as their families.
www.irwinmitchell.com

Veterans Welfare Service (VWS)

Part of Veterans UK, provides welfare and support services to veterans, including advocacy for compensation and pension claims.
www.gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service

The Royal British Legion Benefits, Debt, and Money Advice Service:

Offers financial advice, debt management, and benefit claims assistance.
www.britishlegion.org.uk

Combat Stress Advocacy Service

Helps veterans navigate the healthcare system and get access to the right mental health care.
www.combatstress.org.uk

Sports and Rehabilitation

Battle Back Centre

Offers adaptive sports and adventurous training for injured or wounded veterans to aid recovery.
www.britishlegion.org.uk

Help for Heroes Sports Recovery

Supports veterans in taking part in sports as part of their rehabilitation.
www.helpforheroes.org.uk

British Legion Adaptive Sports

Aims to help veterans regain confidence and ability through participation in sports.
www.britishlegion.org.uk

Charitable Support and Grants

Veterans' Foundation

Provides grants to veterans' charities and organizations that support veterans and their families.
www.veteransfoundation.org.uk

Regimental Charities

Many regiments have their own charitable funds that can provide financial support or grants for veterans and their families.

Seafarers UK

Provides financial grants to support veterans from the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy.
www.theseafarerscharity.org/

Education and Training Grants

Enhanced Learning Credits Scheme (ELC)

Provides financial support for further learning and education for veterans to enhance their skills for post-service careers.
www.enhancedlearningcredits.com

The Royal British Legion Educational Support

Offers educational grants for veterans looking to retrain or gain new qualifications.
www.britishlegion.org.uk

Lifeworks Courses (The Royal British Legion)

Helps veterans improve their skills and employability through training programs.
www.wearelifeworks.org.uk

Bereavement Support

Veterans Bereavement Support Service UK

Provides support to families of veterans who have died. This includes help with funeral arrangements, advice on financial matters, and emotional support for family members.
www.veteransbereavementsupport.org

Help is also offered by **SSAFA**, **The RBL** and the **Single Service Charities**.

Useful links

SSAFA

www.ssafa.org.uk

The Royal British Legion

www.britishlegion.org.uk

Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC)

www.rnrmc.org.uk

ABF - the Soldiers Charity

www.armybenevolentfund.org

RAF Benevolent Fund

www.rafbf.org

RMA - The Royal Marines Charity

www.ma-trmc.org

Discounts and Concessions

Many businesses offer discounts and concessions to veterans, including reduced travel costs, discounts on leisure activities, and special offers on goods and services. Here are the main ones:

Defence Discount Service

www.defencediscountservice.co.uk

The Blue Light Card

www.bluelightcard.co.uk

The Veterans Railcard

www.veterans-railcard.co.uk

These services work together to provide veterans in the UK with comprehensive support across health, financial stability, employment, housing, and general wellbeing.



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Rebuilding
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sight loss

We support ex-Servicemen and
women of all generations, regardless
of how or when they lost their sight.

Call **0800 389 7979** or visit:
blindveterans.org.uk



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



Blind Veterans UK's Working-Age Rehabilitation Program

Sight loss can leave Veterans feeling alone, scared and dependent on others. Blind Veterans UK supports all Veterans regardless of when they served or how they lost their sight.

This support manifests itself in many ways but for those blind Veterans who are of working age one of the most important things the charity offers is a specialist Working-Age Rehabilitation Program. This supports and rehabilitates blind Veterans to help them live independently as a first step for getting back into the workforce.

Over the course of five-days, the Veterans are supported to develop vital independent living skills which will hopefully lead to them accessing, obtaining and remaining in employment. But the course is not just about employment, Veterans are also encouraged and supported to set personal goals and revisit past hobbies or explore new ones.

Each Veteran is different; their sight loss journey is unique and, through a series of group and one-to-one sessions and presentations, they are helped to achieve their goals.

Over seventy blind Veterans have been supported specifically through the charity's Working-Age Rehabilitation Program over the last 12 months.

The program has recently been given a boost with additional funding from Specsavers, one of Blind Veterans UK's corporate partners. Senior PR Manager from Specsavers, Marc Breton, says:

"Specsavers is committed to changing lives through better sight and hearing and has partnered with Blind Veterans UK for over ten years.

"We're proud to support their Working-Age Rehabilitation Program, in order to help Veterans overcome some of the challenges they face with sight loss."

Some of those who have recently been on the course and continue to be supported have shared what the program has meant for them.



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



JILL'S STORY

I've been on the course myself and due to the confidence it gave me, I'm now doing an apprenticeship with the charity supporting the Working-Age Members group and the running of the Working-Age Rehabilitation Program. I get to see for myself the huge difference in the Veterans by the end of the week.

The course isn't all about getting back into work, each Veteran is treated as an individual and for some it is about building their confidence and increasing their independence by setting goals to revisit an old hobby, that they thought was now not possible due to sight loss, or to start a completely new one. Sometimes this step is vital before a Veteran can feel ready to start on the journey back into employment.

For me the charity is not just an organisation that talks about things, they get results and it's a privilege to be a part of that.

I'm an ex-nurse; I served for four years in the Army with the Queen Alexandra Nursing Corps and continued my nursing career after I was discharged. Nursing is such a meaningful role and I felt guilty when I was no longer in paid employment. I wanted to be able to support myself but also to feel a part of something and to be useful.

I hope that through the program, and now my apprenticeship, I will build up my CV and show that I'm motivated and employable.

The staff at Blind Veterans UK support with practical tools such as a laptop with special software and access to relevant learning courses but more than that the staff are there to listen but without interfering. Their support, and that of my fellow blind Veterans, enables and empowers.





WAYNE'S STORY

Being part of the program and the Working Age Members group has given me back my confidence which I lost along with my sight.

In 2022, I was diagnosed with the degenerative eye condition, retinitis pigmentosa. My life changed completely. I'd walked into the consultant's office as an independent man and walked out knowing my life was going to change. I was in tears, my life turned upside down, not knowing how to digest what I'd just been told. I just didn't understand the disease or how I would go forward.

Thankfully I discovered Blind Veterans UK and was welcomed into the Working Age Members Group. In the short time I've been supported by the charity, I've received rehabilitation, advice and equipment that have helped me to get back into running, playing my guitar and completing everyday activities that I took for granted before.

On my recent rehabilitation course, I was asked to share some of the things I'd like to achieve that seemed out of reach to me because of my sight loss. I shared my dream of taking part in the London Marathon.

I was supported to train and prepare for the Worthing 10km in May, with a view to being able to take part in the London Marathon alongside other blind Veterans in 2026. The staff could see how running was giving me back my confidence and allowing me to feel like the person I was before sight loss.

Going forward, I have some thoughts on future employment but for now there is no pressure. With the running improving my mental health and giving me a sense of achievement, the puzzle pieces are all coming together and giving me something to build on.



ROB'S STORY

I served in the Army with the 9th/12th Royal Lancers for 25 years having joined at 16 straight from school. It was after I had already left that I noticed something wrong with my sight.

I was 49-years-old at the time, I walked into the hospital on the advice of the chemist and was told there and then that my optic nerve was dying and I could lose all my sight in my right eye at any time and my left eye was also at risk.

I was at the low vision clinic when the doctor asked what I could see; I described it as looking through the driver's vision port on a tank. The doctor then asked if I had been in the Army and said I was lucky. She gave me the details for the charity and I've never looked back.

I have fought, with the support of the charity, to stay in employment throughout. Through the Working-Age Rehabilitation Program I learnt about reasonable adjustments, access to work legislation and technology that was available to me in the workplace. With this knowledge I have had the confidence to apply for jobs and I've not let my lack of vision hold me back.

It's not a case of not being able to do something because I'm blind. Companies are not employing me for my eyesight, they are employing me for my brain. By having me in the workforce, I can look at problems differently to someone who has sight and with that often comes different solutions."

Blind Veterans UK supports thousands of blind veterans across the country, but knows there are many more who still need its support to rebuild their lives after sight loss.



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

If you, or someone you know, served in the Armed Forces and are now struggling with sight loss, then please get in touch.

**Call 0800 389 7979 or visit:
www.blindveterans.org.uk/gethelp**

WE HELP FORMER SOLDIERS FIND EMPLOYMENT.

Joyce was a serving soldier for over 30 years and needed support to readjust to civilian life after leaving the Army.

Thanks to funding from ABF, Joyce was able to attend an RBLI Lifeworks course to regain her confidence and confirm her transferable skills. She has now secured full-time employment.

To find out more about our work visit
armybenevolentfund.org

In Memory of Lisa Shattock

(1971–2025)

Former Director of Marketing and Communications, SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity

BY ALICE FARROW

The Armed Forces community is mourning the loss of Lisa Shattock, former Director of Marketing and Communications at SSAFA, who has died aged 54. A compassionate leader, a dynamic communicator, and a tireless advocate for service families, Lisa's legacy is deeply woven into the modern identity of the UK's oldest tri-service military charity.

Lisa joined SSAFA with a clear mission: to amplify the charity's voice in a crowded public space while remaining true to its roots of compassion and service. In her time with the organisation, she transformed its communications strategy, launching high-impact campaigns that put the stories of veterans, serving personnel, and their families front and centre. She had an innate ability to tell complex, emotional stories with clarity and heart – an instinct that resonated with supporters and donors across the country.

Colleagues remember Lisa not only for her strategic acumen but for her unrelenting energy and warmth. She brought humour and humanity to even the most high-pressure projects, and had a rare talent for bringing teams together, often mentoring younger staff and championing collaboration across departments. "Lisa could light up a room," one colleague recalled. "She believed in SSAFA's mission with her whole heart, and it showed in everything she did."

Lisa was particularly proud of her work in shaping SSAFA's national brand and ensuring that the charity remained both visible and relevant in a rapidly evolving media landscape. From digital innovation to bold creative storytelling, she modernised how SSAFA connected with the public while never losing sight of the people behind the stories – the veterans seeking support, the families facing hardship, the service leavers starting new chapters.

Her impact reached far beyond SSAFA's headquarters. Lisa was a well-known and respected figure in the wider military charity sector, often contributing her insights on panels and forums, advocating for joined-up approaches across organisations, and promoting inclusivity in the way the Armed Forces community is represented in the media.

Above all, Lisa believed in people. Her passion for supporting those who serve – and those who stand beside them – was more than professional, it was personal. She poured her heart into her work, and that dedication has left an indelible mark not just on SSAFA, but on the thousands of lives the charity touches every year.

Lisa's passing is a profound loss. She leaves behind a loving family, a wide circle of friends and colleagues, and a body of work that will continue to uplift and inspire. We extend our deepest condolences to her family, and to all those who had the privilege of working with her.

She will be missed beyond words.



Her passion for supporting those who serve – and those who stand beside them – was more than professional, it was personal. She poured her heart into her work, and that dedication has left an indelible mark not just on SSAFA, but on the thousands of lives the charity touches every year.

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charity

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT COLIN BELL DFC

Interview by Mike Davis-Marks

Veteran Mosquito pilot of the Second World War Flight Lieutenant Colin Bell, now 104 years old, is a decorated officer with 50 operations over Germany and 13 over Berlin under his belt.



Bell speaks with clarity, candour, and, remarkably, a dry wit. His reflections are a masterclass in history, humility, and hard-earned wisdom.

"My name is Colin Bell, Flight Lieutenant Colin Bell. I was born in 1921, in Woolwich. I joined the Royal Air Force in 1941, but the idea of flying began in 1940, watching Fighter Command taking on the Luftwaffe. Like many young men at the time, I wanted to be a fighter pilot."

He recounts his RAF selection interview with a glint in his eye.

"I was in a room with a Group Captain, a shrink and an engineer. It wasn't going well until the engineer asked how fast a camshaft runs in relation to a crankshaft. I said 'half time'. That was right. The Group Captain laughed. When the Group Captain laughs, everyone laughs. I was in."

"After initial training in Scarborough, I was suddenly posted out. We were shipped across the Atlantic under destroyer escort to Canada and eventually down to Florida. The Americans took over and trained us on Stearman and then Voltee aircraft. I earned my wings – but then came Pearl Harbor.

They decided to keep a few of us back as instructors. One day I was a cadet, the next an instructor!"

Bell trained hundreds of American cadets before finally returning to the UK, clocking over a thousand hours of flight time – an asset that would steer him toward the legendary Mosquito.

"I wanted to fly night fighters. I was hanging around, waiting for a posting when a Group Captain came recruiting for Mosquito pilots in the Pathfinder Force. That was it. I was in."

Colin's route into a Mosquito squadron was characteristically informal.

"They checked me out on a Mosquito with one circuit. Then they put 50 pilots and 50 navigators in a room and said: 'Pair up.' A chap across the room looked miserable – older than most, about 28. I asked if he had a pilot. He said no. I said, 'You do now.' He'd been a navigation instructor in Canada. We got on well – Doug Redman. He wasn't much fun, but I wasn't looking for fun. I was looking for competence. In hindset, he was the best navigator I could have chosen"

Bell and Redman joined 608 Squadron at RAF Downham Market. The reality of operational flying set in quickly.

"Even in training, you could lose people. But one mission stands out. Our fifth sortie – to Berlin. We were bracketed by anti-aircraft fire. One shell exploded beneath us and knocked out both engines. The cockpit lit up like daylight. My navigator, Doug, leaned over and asked, 'What do we do now?' I said, 'We wait.' We glided. And then, thankfully, the engines came back. Later, ground crew found shrapnel in my parachute. I told my son it was touch and go whether he'd ever have been born."

He describes his 'mascot' – a chilling reminder of the brutal realities for downed aircrew.

"I carried a Smith & Wesson .38 and 20 rounds. Not for the enemy exactly – Hitler and Goebbels had encouraged civilians to lynch Allied aircrew. If I came down, I wasn't going to let myself be taken."

Colin took part in the operation to destroy the research facility at Peenemünde, Germany. He recounts:

"So the Peenemünde raid – where the Germans were developing the V-weapons – we did a frightful amount of damage there. It set back the development of the V-weapons by many months. When the Commandant, who had been lunching with Hitler, heard about the raid, he hot-footed it down from Berlin to Peenemünde. When he saw the damage, he had a seizure and dropped down dead. And as I said to my friends when I heard about this I felt deeply satisfied."

When asked about being part of the 'Greatest Generation', his tone grows firm.

"What today's generation must understand is that freedom isn't free. You want peace? Prepare for war. We need to spend more, up to 5% of GDP on defence. I met a Polish officer in 1944. The Gestapo took his house. At 2 a.m. they told him: 'Leave or your children die.' That's tyranny. That's what you must never be unprepared for."

After over 30 minutes of vivid, moving recollections, we draw to a close. "Flight Lieutenant Bell, it's been an honour. Your memory, your insight, and your service are extraordinary."

"Thank you. It's important these stories are told."

FOCUS ON

Inheritance Tax and the Military

There's over 159,000 people working full-time for the Armed Forces in the UK. The majority of them work for the Army, with the remainder split between the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force. For these service personnel and veterans, there are little known, but potentially highly valuable Inheritance Tax (IHT) advantages.

WHAT IS INHERITANCE TAX?

IHT is tax on a deceased person's estate. This is set at a rate of 40% above their tax-free threshold, known as the Nil Rate Band. IHT can double-up through being transferred where a person has been married or in a civil partnership (and their spouse or civil partner has died before them), and any other threshold, reliefs or exemptions. The Nil Rate Band is currently limited to £325,000 per individual, and is currently fixed until April 2026.

Inheritance Tax (IHT) remains one of the more complex areas of estate planning, particularly for members of the UK's Armed Forces. Law firm Irwin Mitchell outlined several little-known but significant IHT exemptions available to military personnel and veterans. While many of these advantages still apply, recent policy developments are beginning to reshape the landscape.

WHAT THE 2022 GUIDANCE SAID

Under Section 154 of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984, estates of individuals who die on active service or as a result of injuries sustained in the line of duty are exempt from IHT. This exemption also extends to:

- Retired personnel whose death is linked to service-related injuries.
- Civilians under service discipline, such as humanitarian aid workers and constables.
- Individuals targeted due to their role, even if not on active duty at the time.
- Furthermore, the use of the Nil Rate Band (£325,000) and the Residence Nil Rate Band (£175,000), which can be doubled for married couples or civil partners. These thresholds remain frozen until April 2030.

WHY THIS STILL MATTERS

These exemptions can significantly reduce or eliminate IHT liabilities for bereaved families. However, Irwin Mitchell noted that many families miss out on these benefits due to lack of awareness or failure to claim them during probate.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

The UK government has announced significant changes to pensions—set to take effect in April 2027—that will affect death-in-service payments:

- If these payments are not left to a spouse or civil partner, they may now be subject to IHT.
- This change could impact unmarried partners, children, and other dependents, who previously benefited from tax-free lump sums.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

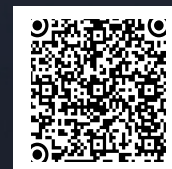
While the core IHT exemptions under Section 154 remain intact, the new rules may disadvantage certain families—particularly unmarried service members.

Legal experts and advocacy groups are urging families to review their estate planning and seek professional advice to ensure they are not caught off guard by the upcoming changes.



For more info and help, please contact Irwin Mitchell at:

 irwinmitchell.com



Scan the QR code to sign up to our Military in Focus newsletter.

Unite Veterans with their pensions

Campaign appeal from Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund



The largest campaign appeal to date is being funded by the Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund (FPSCF), the charity arm of the Forces Pension Society (FPS). It involves a major advertising campaign in a wide spectrum of military media across all three services. The campaign theme is “Help us unite Veterans with their pensions.”

This latest appeal is part of an ongoing campaign, begun by the FPS, which identified the fact that historically, around 2,000 preserved Armed Forces pensions go unclaimed each year. Currently there are almost 15,000 pensions that remain unclaimed, many involving significant sums of money.

Pensions are not paid automatically. Veterans must apply to Veterans UK, using AFPS Form 8, or telephone 0800 085 3600.

In addition to seeking help from the military community to unite Veterans with their entitlements, the FPSCF will campaign for a change in the rules, insisting the issue can be addressed via improvements to current practices. The charity will also encourage donations to help fund the programme.

“For most former service personnel, a pension makes a considerable difference. And it is only right the MoD pays Veterans the pensions to which they are entitled. To this end, we will seek the support of the military community in identifying those who should be united with their pension. That’s why our campaign will reach across all three services delivering our powerful message in large space sizes and directing people to dedicated web pages.

“Additionally, we will press for reform of the current arrangements whereby the application rules result in Veterans missing out. We believe change is consistent with the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant.”



Group Captain (Retired)
Jonathan Wheeler OBE
Chairman of the FPSCF

FPSCF is the charitable arm of the FPS.

The Charity supports the charitable work undertaken by the FPS and works with the War Widows and the Single Service Widow Associations, members of the Forces Pension Society or persons who served in the Armed Forces of the Crown (whether or not they were members of the Forces Pension Society) who are in need by virtue of financial hardship, sickness, disability or the effects of old age.

The FPSCF is a charity registered with the Charity Commission, charity number 264524.



Our Commitment to Veterans

Forces Pension Society



CHAMPIONING
ARMED FORCES PENSIONS
SINCE 1946

We believe that commitment is a two-way street.

Servicemen and women sign up to the principle of selfless commitment and we strive to reciprocate by supporting Veterans and the whole military community.

We provide pension guidance across all aspects of the Armed Forces Pension Schemes, challenging governments wherever we identify injustices in the system. Our latest campaign is helping unite entitled Veterans with their unclaimed Armed Forces pension.

Visit: forcespensionsociety.org/unclaimedpensions/

We help the military community understand how to make better pension choices for themselves and their families, and provide a voice where it matters on the MoD and Public Sector Pension Boards.

Why join?

We can guide you on how to keep an eye on your pension entitlement; know who to speak to and when; how and when to apply for your pension; how to understand family benefits; and more!

Membership for you and your spouse/partner is just **£47pa**.

When you join us, you will have exclusive access to our Forces Pensions Consultants, our informative Members' webinars and you'll receive our biannual e-newsletters and our magazine, Pennant. You can also save on great brands and services with our exclusive member offers.

Visit: forcespensionsociety.org/join-now/



SCAN ME

IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND YOUR PENSION

The Society is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that acts as a pension watchdog for the entire military community. It's work is funded by membership subscriptions. Any surplus helps fund our outreach programme of free-to-attend Roadshow briefings and events to those serving, service leavers, veterans and families.

Forces Pension Society

68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London SW8 1RL.

T:020 7820 9988 E: memsec@forpen.co.uk www.forcespensionsociety.org



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TRINITY INSURANCE BRIEFING



By Brigadier (Retd) Alan Richmond,
Chief Operating Officer, Trinity Insurance

Mitigating Risk in Civvy Street



At Trinity Insurance, we are proud to serve those who've served. Supporting the transition from military to civilian life is at the heart of our mission. For many veterans, stepping into "Civvy Street" brings opportunity – but also uncertainty. While military life offers structure, support, and stability, the civilian world presents a different landscape of risks, often less familiar but just as important to manage.

One of the most pressing challenges is the shift in the support that Servicemen and women sometimes take for granted. In uniform, essentials like medical care, accommodation and life cover are provided for or facilitated. Post-service, these responsibilities shift to the individual. Veterans must proactively protect themselves and their families – and that starts with informed financial planning. At Trinity, we and our trusted partners offer products specifically designed with the Service community in mind, from life and home insurance to income protection and critical illness cover.

Employment risk is another concern. While veterans bring outstanding skills to the workplace, civilian employment can be unpredictable. Having financial protection in place – such as cover for loss of income due to redundancy or illness – ensures that one setback doesn't derail your progress. Policies from Trinity's network of trusted partners are tailored to support

veterans in all stages of their post-service careers.

Whilst in service, Armed Forces personnel have access to almost immediate medical and dental care but life outside can be very different. Securing a GP or NHS Dentist appointment are not so easy and many of the procedures that are swift and free for serving personnel can involve a long wait and significant cost. This is why Trinity is developing an affordable health insurance scheme for veterans and their families which will ensure they receive a similar level of medical and dental care that they enjoyed whilst serving.

Mental health and wellbeing are critical, too. Leaving a close-knit unit can lead to feelings of disconnection. At Trinity, we understand the importance of mental wellbeing, which is why our health product will include access to mental resilience programmes and mental health support.

Additionally, many standard insurers struggle to understand the unique nature of military life. At Trinity, we don't penalise you for your service – we recognise it. As a veteran-run business, we instinctively understand your needs and our products reflect your lifestyle, career path, and transition journey. Whether you're just leaving, have recently settled, or are years into civilian life, we ensure your cover fits your circumstances – not the other way around.

In summary, the risks of civilian life are best met with preparation, clarity, and the right protection. Trinity Insurance was founded to stand beside the Armed Forces community with experience, understanding, and purpose-built support. As veterans navigate Civvy Street, our job is simple: to make sure they never have to face life's challenges alone.



We are Trinity.

Trinity has been serving the Armed Forces community for over 22 years. You can find a range of products for regulars, reservists, veterans and forces friends on our website.

hello@talktotrinity.com

or

01243 817777

www.TalktoTrinity.com



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GOLD AWARD

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4.9/5 based on customer feedback



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Provide your details and we'll enter you into a prize draw to win £50 Amazon voucher.

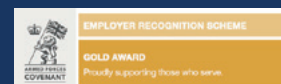
Provide us with your renewal date for your buildings and contents insurance and you'll be automatically entered into our monthly Amazon Gift Card Draw. See web page for link to the Terms and Conditions.

GET AN ONLINE
QUOTE NOW



TRINITY

Trinity Insurance Services Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) number: 307068 and registered in England and Wales number: 03904541.



*For every policy sold we as Trinity, and the Underwriters of the policy, HCC International Insurance Company plc (trading as Tokio Marine HCC), will donate £5 to your chosen charity from those listed.



Alpine. The UK's Leading ESG Fire Suppression Company

Alpine Fire Engineers are specialist providers in the design, project management and maintenance of active fire suppression systems. Since 1992, the business has been delivering cost effective and operationally efficient solutions to companies right across the UK.



They aim to help protect people and property through the provision of specialist systems that are tailored to each customer's needs, and are committed to providing exceptional customer service and finding the perfect solution no matter how bespoke.

Alpine also strives to cultivate engineering excellence through its 'grow our own' trainee scheme which is designed to educate and train the engineering talent of tomorrow.

Offering opportunities to people who demonstrate a willingness to learn and progress within the engineering industry, the initiative allows trainees to work across multiple departments, ensuring each individual finds the niche that aligns with their passions and skillset.

The scheme is open to individuals from all walks of life, including those at any professional level who might be seeking a career change, which is precisely the route Tom Wilson took.

The skills he acquired while serving in the Royal Navy aligned perfectly with Alpine's core values – people-focused, integrity, teamwork, humility, expertise, dedication, and exceptional customer service.

Alpine appreciate hard-working individuals who understand the value of teamwork, along with the dedication and integrity that often coincide with the skills and experience people gain from spending time within the armed forces.

It's for these reasons that Alpine – and the wider engineering and manufacturing sector – are tapping into the highly-skilled talent pool of those who have served in the armed forces, recognising that these individuals approach their work with diligence, care, and expertise.

And when combined with Alpine's commitment to supporting employee wellbeing, fostering an environment of continued progression, and creating opportunities for those who demonstrate passion and a willingness to learn, veterans like Tom can forge a fulfilling and rewarding new career path as they adjust to life away from the world of service.

Regardless of your professional background, they are always eager to hear from people interested in forging a career within engineering and truly making a difference in an exciting sector.

If you're interested in learning more about Alpine Fire and how they could potentially support your new career, please reach out to them today by visiting:

www.alpinefire.co.uk

Meet Tom Wilson

Adjusting from military to civilian life isn't straightforward. Finding a suitable job can take time, but the right company will help you feel at home. Here we speak to fire pump engineer, Tom Wilson, who spent five years in the Royal Navy before finding the perfect role at Alpine Fire, to see how he's made the transition from the armed forces to the world of work.



“Alpine cares for its employees. You're treated like a person and not a number, which over the years, I've unfortunately seen many companies fail to deliver – ultimately creating a poor working environment.”

Describe your career journey to date.

I left school in 2006 and joined my family's business – a small fire sprinkler company. Four years later the recession hit, so I decided to change career and join the Royal Navy.

After completing service, I returned to the world of fire sprinklers. For over a year I've worked at Alpine Fire, a leading fire suppression company. I started as a mechanical/electric service engineer before progressing to the role of fire pump engineer.

How was the Royal Navy and how did you manage the transition?

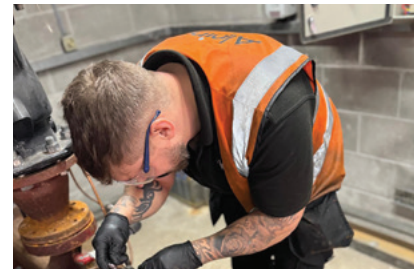
I travelled the world carrying out naval operations. The experience was great, but transitioning from military to civilian life was unexpectedly challenging. I had become comfortable with military life and found it difficult to return to an 'ordinary' routine. It was a way of life, and I was almost 'institutionalised.'

But since working for Alpine, I've built a clear view of my future. In the last 12 months I'm finally in a position where I'm comfortable.

What transferable skills did you learn in the Royal Navy that have helped you at Alpine?

Many veterans feel as though their skills are non-transferable which isn't the case. We learn plenty of valuable skills that can be applied to numerous jobs.

The core values taught during our service are like those at Alpine: people-focused, integrity, and teamwork. Joining Alpine, where everyone embodies these values, has streamlined my transition.



What's your experience been like at Alpine?

Alpine cares for its employees. You're treated like a person and not a number, which over the years, I've unfortunately seen many companies fail to deliver – ultimately creating a poor working environment.

There's a reason why Alpine won The Sunday Times Best Places to Work award, and I'm happy to be part of a company that prioritises its employees.

What's your advice to someone considering applying for a job at Alpine?

Simply pick up the phone and chat with us. Everyone is willing to help – you never know until you try. It's an evolving industry with roles to suit anyone eager to grow their career.



Alpine.



VETERAN FORCE

BUILDING A BETTER, MORE RESILIENT SOCIETY

VETERAN FORCE

A GRASSROOTS VETERAN-LED MOVEMENT TO REBUILD COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL RESILIENCE

By Alan Spence

The UK is facing a deepening crisis in social and community resilience. From rising poverty to growing isolation, the unmet needs of individuals, families, and communities are intensifying in the face of economic strain and national challenges. Against this backdrop, Veteran Force, a new grassroots initiative, primarily led by Veterans and powered by volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, is taking a major step forward with the launch of Veteran Force Resilience CIC to raise and distribute microfinance grants to local Veteran-led Volunteer Groups (VVGs) that design and deliver community-based solutions.

These groups are driven not by hierarchy or top-down mandates, but by lived experience and a strong local understanding of where help is most urgently needed.

At its heart, Veteran Force exists to empower communities to help themselves.

Veteran Force is a voluntary, bottom-up movement built on the belief that Veterans – drawing on their leadership, teamwork, and operational expertise – can play a crucial role in helping communities recover, rebuild and socially prosper in every sense.

Through the development and support of local VVGs, the movement aims to tackle multiple dimensions of poverty, unmet need and social issues, ranging from food insecurity and poor transport access to digital exclusion, housing shortages and youth crime.

KEY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND FIRST STEPS

In a significant new development, Veteran Force is now collaborating with the Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC), a UK-wide network of around 170 locations offering practical support to Veterans and their families. This partnership will give new VVGs access to ASDIC's reach and expertise, strengthening community ties and maximising coordinated support.

The movement is also celebrating its first official Veteran Force Exemplar: Veterans Volunteer Service (VVS) in Littlehampton. Founded by Para Veteran Gary Hart and his wife, Poppy, a qualified Martial Arts Instructor, VVS began by addressing youth violence on the streets of their seaside town and has since expanded to Brighton.

VVS demonstrates the impact of grassroots action led by Veterans who understand their communities and act from the frontlines of lived experience.

Importantly, Veteran Force is not about exporting a one-size-fits-all model. Like ASDIC, it promotes a flexible, localised approach. VVGs are shaped by the unique needs of their communities – urban or rural, young or old, affluent or deprived.

“... Veteran Force is now collaborating with the Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC), a UK-wide network of around 170 locations offering practical support to Veterans and their families.”



VETERAN FORCE

“Many Veterans benefit personally from volunteering, and many VVGs will support other Veterans along with the general public. These common aims suggest real potential for collaboration.”



SHARED VISION WITH GOVERNMENT

There are interesting synergies with the government's VALOUR programme, which seeks to streamline and integrate Veteran services at local level. While VALOUR focuses on direct services for Veterans and their families, Veteran Force focuses on recruiting Veterans to help communities more broadly. But the overlap is significant. Many Veterans benefit personally from volunteering, and many VVGs will support other Veterans along with the general public. These common aims suggest real potential for collaboration.

BUILDING THE NETWORK

Veteran Force will expand the VVG network in two ways:

- 1. Partnerships:** working with organisations across public, private, and third sectors (e.g., ASDIC, Covenant signatories, local councils).
- 2. Organic Growth:** championing and supporting new VVGs formed by Veterans, community members, military associations, charities and other bodies, including faith groups.

Veterans employed in local hospitals, police, utilities, education, or other sectors may find ways to lead or support a VVG. Community connections matter – many people know someone with military experience who could be inspired to get involved.

WHAT DO VVGs ACTUALLY DO?

The activities of VVGs are as diverse as the many problems and unmet needs of the communities they serve. Some examples – of which there are many – include:

- Distributing surplus food to those in need;
- Offering transport to medical appointments;
- Helping with weekly shopping for the elderly or disabled;
- Tutoring people facing digital exclusion;
- Organising gardening or cooking groups;
- Hosting reading or art classes;
- Providing home repairs or pet care for vulnerable individuals;
- Teaching First Aid, swimming, or self-defence;
- Offering financial literacy workshops;
- Running drop-in social sessions;
- Coordinating local emergency preparedness;
- Hosting citizenship programmes for youth.

These initiatives, even the smallest, can make a measurable difference to those struggling with daily challenges. But they also foster belonging, purpose, and cohesion – among volunteers as well as recipients. In doing so, they help rebuild the social fabric essential to a resilient society.

MEDIA CAMPAIGN AND BROADER IMPACT

Veteran Force will incrementally deploy a national media campaign highlighting not only its impact on communities, but also its contribution to Veterans' wellbeing, armed forces recruitment, military charities, and national events like Remembrance Day.

Additionally, the campaign will focus on the budgetary and resource relief accruing to local authorities, NHS trusts, emergency services, and even prison services as a result of VVG interventions, especially those that prevent crises before they escalate.

GET INVOLVED

Veteran Force is a movement, not a mandate. VVGs work because they come from the ground up, driven by local leadership and national support. As the Veteran Force network grows, so too does the potential to meet rising need with human-centred, community-powered solutions.

To learn more or to explore starting or supporting a VVG: Contact
alan.spence@veteranforce.uk or
mike.davis-marks@veteranforce.uk

There when you need her



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 **Lady Grover**
Armed Forces' Health Support

The Association of Service Drop-In Centres

Following the recent decision by Veteran Force and the Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC) to collaborate at grass roots level to maximise both organisations' benefits to Veterans and Veteran-led Volunteer Groups in broader society, **ASDIC Executive Director Barry Bryant** recounts the story of its origins, development and success.

The evolution and subsequent success of ASDIC over the past decade arose from a fundamental societal shift of emphasis within our ex-Service community.

Following the Falklands conflict and the subsequent desert wars, resulting in a broader and more widely appreciated range of physical and mental needs, a new breed of younger veterans began to take stock.

They realised that the traditional but fragmented and often siloed approach of the existing military charity establishment was ill-equipped to meet their needs.

Entirely of their own volition, many saw the need for very local and person-centred advice and care within their own localities and communities.

Far away from the former top-down and process-driven assessments of need, they founded their own Drop-In centres in village halls, the back rooms of cafes and community spaces.

Perhaps innately, they realised that the more modern veteran really valued the on-the-spot friendship and compassion of their erstwhile colleagues.

Coupled with the strength and advice available within their civilian communities, Drop-Ins could offer a greater sense of comradeship and immediate inner strength than a series of longer-term assessments and subsequent almonisation.

Faced with this mushroom-like but uncoordinated growth across the nation, there was a far-sighted realisation that the huge potential strength of this grassroots movement needed a united front to properly represent them on the national stage, and thus the ASDIC movement was born. This rapidly gained a following across the south of England and subsequently across the nation.

By late 2019 there was sufficient momentum to demand a more permanent structure to bring this network together and enable proper representation to higher authorities. A new Chief Executive was appointed, with a small staff, to coordinate the movement, develop a membership directory and website, and consider how best to integrate this new force with the existing welfare structure.

ASDIC became a registered charity with a small group of supportive trustees. In early 2021, a new injection of government funding for veterans was provided to generate an innovative 'Veterans Places, Pathways and People' (VPPP) programme, and ASDIC was chosen as a Strategic Partner. Three years of considerable success followed, including two major national conferences in Leeds and close integration with other MoD

(particularly the new Office of Veterans' Affairs (OVA)) and national organisations including the NHS and DWP. It was also elected to the Executive Committee of Cobseo as well as being supported by other philanthropic and some military foundations.

In late 2023, ASDIC was chosen to receive an extremely supportive pro bono impact evaluation by the major national consultancy EY-Parthenon.

However, and despite there being no obvious change in the national requirement for veterans' provision and representation, in early 2024 there was a shift in the direction of support and consequent funding, leading to a reduction in what ASDIC could achieve.

Nonetheless, we remain absolutely committed to the principle of integrating our veterans back into society, and ensuring that society itself really appreciates the values and standards they can bring. We believe there should be a far more level playing field in the distribution of vital funding to all organisations working in communities at the coalface of need.

ASDIC very much wishes to harness the support of more forward-looking community and defence-related organisations to enable it to move forward and achieve the potential that its members and their thousands of veterans clearly deserve.

In light of this we warmly welcome our agreed collaboration with Veteran Force with whom we have shared belief in addressing grass-roots community problems locally and aspirationally we are two sides of the same coin.



Find out more at:
www.asdic.org.uk

CASE STUDY : Woody's Lodge

CD is a veteran of the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) who was medically discharged 10 years ago. This had a significant impact on his mental health, ultimately leading to the breakdown of his marriage. He was left to raise his sons on his own. Over time, his mental health deteriorated further, and despite multiple attempts to access support from veteran-specific charities, he was unsuccessful. CD eventually attended a drop-in session at Woody's Lodge, where we were able to provide benefit advice and peer mentoring support for both him and his children. He is now a regular volunteer and peer mentor with the charity, and both his mental health and family life have shown marked improvement.



CASE STUDY : Veterans in Crisis

After receiving a report about a veteran who'd been street homeless for 7 months with no financial support, we worked in collaboration with our new Armed Forces champion at the DWP to secure him his benefits. Santander helped to set up a bank account while Anchor Housing provided him a lovely studio apartment close to his family. He moved into his new property exactly a week after we first met him. VICs paid his first month's rent, provided furniture, bedding and store cupboard essentials. It was incredibly rewarding to witness the change in this individual once his challenges had been resolved. He went on to turn his life around and find full time employment locally.



CASE STUDY : Hull 4 Heroes

Recently, we took a young ex-soldier off the streets of Hull. He had been sleeping in doorways over winter, battling the cold with nowhere to turn. But after a concerned citizen brought him into us, he is no longer homeless. As with every veteran we help, the moment they reach us, they have a roof over their head and the support to start their path forward. He is now in warm, temporary accommodation and beginning his journey to rebuild his life. In the last few weeks, we at Hull for Heroes have also supported six other homeless veterans, ensuring they are safe, warm, and have the support they need.



CASE STUDY : The Block and Tom Harrison House collaboration

The Block was first contacted by the Liverpool White Chapel homeless team and alcohol specialists based at Aintree hospital about this veteran in November 2024. A rapid intervention to address his homelessness was followed by a three-month support and exit plan into specialist treatment at Tom Harrison House. 12 weeks after starting treatment, this RAF veteran celebrated his 'graduation'. He thanked all the therapists and clients, the alcohol team, Merseycare and The White Chapel hospital team. Communication and strategic partnerships proved pivotal once again to offer this military service leaver a support pathway. This is the road to success, but it is just the beginning of his life story.





“Ideal partnership” to deliver Veterans services and community resilience

As **Veteran Force** and the **Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC)** commence their collaboration to the benefit of both Veterans and wider society, **ASDIC Executive Director Barry Bryant** describes how the two organisations’ shared belief in direct action at grass-roots level makes for an “ideal partnership” as Veterans’ increasingly turn to locally based services for tailored assistance rather than depending entirely on large “top down” traditional service charities.

Institutions which have ploughed the same worthy, consistent but perhaps complacent furrow for many decades ultimately have to realise that society always inexorably evolves in its direction of travel – and the military welfare sector is no different.

Younger, better-educated and more socially aware Veterans will no longer unthinkingly accept the traditional top-down, ‘seniority knows best’ approach of many large, established (and hugely well-endowed) Service charities.

Indeed, they often prefer to refer to themselves as ‘ex-military’ rather than ‘Veterans’, reflecting their belief in their own personalities as experienced and valuable citizens in their own right rather than products of a necessarily dirigiste system.

Increasingly, and particularly since the pandemic when much traditional support was withdrawn, their older colleagues realised that local groups were continuing to offer tailored assistance by delivering food, relieving loneliness and keeping in contact through open windows! Thus things changed.

Over the past twenty or so years this attitudinal change has been reflected in the ever-increasing number of informal ‘Drop-In Centres’, or Hubs, which have been set up in local communities, usually by former service personnel who desperately want to give something back in their own, often very personal, way.

Frequently these individuals have fought through their own difficulties with the strength of their own personalities, and their experiences have much to offer erstwhile colleagues. The Centres are based in village halls, the back rooms of pubs, community centres or even private dwellings; they are all different in style and detail but equally very similar in purpose. Their founders and leaders recognise the huge ethos and qualities imbued by time spent in the armed forces, but they also realise that many of these people of whatever age and background have moved on, both physically and mentally, from the barrack square or messdeck.

A great strength of almost all Centres is being based in their own local community, supported by friends, colleagues and families and known to the host of other groups within the local area.

Often support, material and professional assistance will be offered through personal knowledge and empathy rather than via more traditional charitable routes. Of course, such local knowledge also extends to job and housing opportunities while equally enabling local communities to truly appreciate what Veterans can, in turn, contribute to society. Often the generosity of local donors is enhanced by the obvious visibility of what that generosity has enabled.

However, what all these individual Centres initially lacked was a network that could bring them together as well as offering guidance, support and direction without being in any way regulatory or officious.

This could also represent the totality of the grassroots movement to the more established charities and indeed to ministers and government bodies. Thus the Association of Service Drop-In Centres, known as ASDIC, was conceived and continues to evolve.

ASDIC emerged in 2016 to provide a focus for this national network, initially just as a listing on a website, to enable all these Centres to be recognised and flourish. Today’s support focuses on integration and collaboration across both local and national networks, including within the devolved administrations, to enable the eventual successful transition of our Veterans as valued citizens within their communities.

“At its heart, each Centre offers much sought-after understanding, a warm welcome and fellowship while also warding off the loneliness and social isolation which can so often challenge our Veterans community.”

The Association is now an independent charity and sits on the Cobseo Executive Board in a representative role for all grassroots activity. Words such as 'grassroots', or the 'coalface of need' are increasingly used to clearly illustrate the real-time, real-people nature of our activities, unencumbered by layers of needless bureaucracy or weighed down by unnecessary process.

Our published Directory of Member Locations offers physical spaces in companionable, no-pressure environments for those seeking help to offload their issues or share their worries.

At its heart, each Centre offers much sought-after understanding, a warm welcome and fellowship while also warding off the loneliness and social isolation which can so often challenge our Veterans community. It offers all aspects of practical, social and peer support in one place, including mental health and wellbeing concerns, with options for further specialist help available through well-informed wider local and regional networks.

Often situated in the heart of a community, Centres open regularly and are contactable directly as required. On site, representatives from other organisations may be present to offer a range of targeted guidance and advice. These could include larger national military charities, community support organisations like Citizens Advice, or DWP, NHS and local authority bodies.

If the answer to a problem or issue isn't known there and then, the staff present will make sure they find out as soon as possible! They will also often offer Activity Focused groups, such as gardening, model making, art, walking, boxing and themed talks/discussions, and these wide opportunities are often extended to family members, friends and colleagues.

These groups promote focus and strength within the community, and very much align with the present Government's emphasis on the need for a robust and thriving civil society. This integration is reinforced by the ready welcome offered to 'blue-light' personnel from the police, fire and ambulance services – often Veterans themselves.

Breakfast Clubs

Many will be aware that there is also a network of Veterans' Breakfast Clubs across the nation. These are very much focused on comradeship, 'returning to the tribe' and social interaction.

Although focusing very much on community integration rather than militaristic nostalgia, ASDIC accepts some of these Breakfast Clubs as members where additional support, advice and guidance is offered in the 'Drop-In style'. Also, there may be a Breakfast Club attached to a more traditional Drop-In or Hub.



'Winter Warmer' offerings

Over the last couple of years, in response to cost-of-living pressures, many of our Centres have offered specific support to help overcome the challenges of financial difficulty through winter months. This has included warmth and companionship, hot food, and access to a food bank and/or assistance with meter top-up cards. The latter may be available on site or following referral to local facilities. For many this overarching support has been life changing.

We at ASDIC strongly believe that we offer much added value to this innovative level of Veterans support. Veterans, their families and integration with wider society are at the heart of everything we do, and our 'bottom-up' approach – using regular feedback from our members to assess need – allows us to target support and representation, when and where it's required.

Our services include an accessible helpline and a hugely valuable service verification process in partnership with the Ministry of Defence known as VetCheck, which has helped hundreds of Veterans access benefits.

ASDIC also offers learning and development opportunities, workshops and visits, and overarching representation at the highest level.

Anyone seeking help, advice or simply comradeship in their local area can find all the information they need to find a friendly face and a place to go, on our website www.asdic.org.uk or email our team at admin@asdic.org.uk.

For any further enquiries, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us directly as above, or follow us on LinkedIn and/or Facebook.



Find out more at:
www.asdic.org.uk

Veteran Force and ASDIC agree "ideal partnership"

Our members hugely value the power of ASDIC's network, a sense of belonging and an ability to contribute to the overall picture, linking up with fellow members across the UK to share experiences, plus many opportunities to collaborate and share best practice with others to achieve the optimum support for their beneficiaries.

Moreover, in the wider sense, we believe civil society is immeasurably strengthened by harnessing the experience, abilities and qualities of ex-Service personnel.

As such, Veteran Force's campaign to champion and promote Veteran-led Volunteer Groups makes the Veteran Force movement an ideal partner for ASDIC going forward – and vice versa.

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SERVICE, SACRIFICE, AND COMMUNITY

The Work of the Veterans Volunteer Service

By Alan Spence

“VVS’s mission? To honour Veterans, support vulnerable people, and guide young people toward purpose and responsibility through active, hands-on community engagement.”



In the seaside town of Littlehampton, a remarkable community movement is quietly transforming lives. The Veterans Volunteer Service (VVS), founded by Gary and Poppy Hart, is a Veteran-led volunteer organisation built on the core values of service, good citizenship and instructive remembrance of sacrifice and resilience.

Gary is a former member of 3 Para and 1 Para Special Forces Support Group, and Poppy a fully qualified martial arts instructor, with both holding safeguarding and first aid qualifications through England Boxing.

VVS’s mission? To honour Veterans, support vulnerable people, and guide young people toward purpose and responsibility through active, hands-on community engagement.

“It started with the idea that service doesn’t end when the uniform comes

off,” says Gary. “We wanted to continue serving – but this time in the heart of the community.”

From fitness and mentoring programmes for local youth to care support for blind veterans and evocative battlefield tributes, the VVS is not just helping people – it’s helping to rebuild the very fabric of local community.

From combat to community

Gary Hart’s journey from military service to community Veteran was driven by a desire to help fellow Veterans transition to civilian life with dignity and purpose.

“I saw too many good men and women struggle after leaving service,” he explains. “Isolation, lack of routine, and the sense of being forgotten – that hits harder than people realise. We decided to do something about it.”

In partnership with his wife, Poppy, the couple launched VVS in 2022. What began with informal gatherings of ex-service members has now evolved into a thriving hub of intergenerational support.

“The military teaches resilience, structure, and loyalty,” says Poppy. “We realised those are the exact values young people today are crying out for. Veterans and youth might seem like an unlikely match – but when mixed together they lift each other.”

“We are running a three-day youth focus at Lodge Hill activity centre near Pulborough in September with a training team made of ex-SAS, Parachute Regiment and Guards,” says Gary.

“This will be high end training that surpasses anything currently available and will focus on physical attribute, morse code, tracking and remote survival, rough cooking, atmospherics, first aid, blue light handovers... all under pressure and tested in scenarios.”

Fit 'n Feed: fuel for body and mind

At the heart of VVS's youth outreach is its flagship programme, Fit 'n Feed. This initiative combines physical activity with nutrition and mentoring, providing local children and teens with a safe space to grow, learn, and be supported.

“Fit 'n Feed isn't just about burning off energy,” says Poppy. “It's about building character. After a session of drills or team games with Veterans, we share a hot meal and talk – about mental health, decision-making, friendships, the future. We want these kids to feel seen and valued”.

The programme, often run on weekends and during school holidays, has already reached dozens of young people across Littlehampton and nearby Yapton. For some participants, the food is vital. For all of them, the structure and mentoring are life-changing.

“We've had kids who didn't speak on day one, and now they're leading group warm-ups,” Gary adds. “That's the power of consistent encouragement and structure.”



Supporting blind and vulnerable Veterans

Whilst youth engagement is a big part of their work, VVS has never strayed from its founding mission.

“When the charity Blind Veterans UK needed 15 additional volunteers to help blind and vision-impaired Veterans participate in this year's South Coast Ultra Walk for Blind Veterans, part of the South Coast Ultra Challenge, which Blind Veterans UK participates in each year, they approached VVS for help.

“We were delighted to help out,” says Poppy, “It means we'll be helping blind

“We've had kids who didn't speak on day one, and now they're leading group warm-ups.”

and vision-impaired Veterans walk 25, 57 or 100km – the latter the full stretch from Eastbourne to Arundel”.

The organisation also coordinates practical help for elderly or vulnerable residents, ranging from home repairs to food deliveries and welfare checks.



WALKING WITH HISTORY THE SOMME LOG CARRY

Earlier this year, the VVS drew national attention with a moving and symbolic fundraising event: a sponsored walk down the Somme Valley in France in remembrance of Cpl Mark Wright who died in Kajaki, Helmand Province, in 2006 with 3 Para.

The walk featured volunteers carrying a 30-kilo wooden log with “Mark Wright GC” etched into it the length of the 15-mile trek in his memory and representing the burden of war.

“The log was physically exhausting to carry – but it also sparked deep conversations about sacrifice, trauma, and what remembrance really means,” Gary reflects. “That’s what we wanted.”

The event raised critical funds for VVS programmes and reminded everyone involved of the importance of connecting history to the present.



Meanwhile, Gary and Poppy have been invited to visit the Mark Wright Foundation in Edinburgh “to see where we can pull things together”.

Another focus of tribute and remembrance on this and previous Somme fund-raising walks focuses on the bravery and leadership of Captain Wilfred Nevill who kicked footballs into “No Man’s Land” on 1 July 1916, the first morning of the battle.

“His footballs into battle were a gesture of hope and unity” says Poppy. “That’s exactly what we’re trying to bring into communities today.”

“We lay a football for Captain Nevill each year on his grave in Carnoy cemetery. We also speak of him at remembrance gatherings such as school assemblies and church meetings”.

Meanwhile, later this year VVS will lead a Service of Tribute and Remembrance at The Tower of London for Talaiaasi Labalaba, a British Fijian and ex-Royal Ulster Rifles' and SAS soldier killed in Mirbat in Oman in 1972.

Set against the solemn backdrop of one of Britain's most iconic military landmarks, the event will include military representatives, youth participants from Fit 'n Feed, and descendants of WWI soldiers.

Growing together: the VVS allotment at Yapton

Back home, another VVS project is quietly making a difference in the community – a community allotment in Yapton. Open to Veterans, youth participants, and local families, the allotment provides a calming and productive space to grow food, friendships, and confidence. Blind Veterans UK also use the allotment as part of their wellbeing programmes.

"There's something healing about digging in the dirt together," Gary says with a smile. "No ranks, no uniforms, just people working side-by-side."

The food grown is often used in Fit 'n Feed meals or donated to local food banks, reinforcing VVS's full-circle commitment to community care.

Patronage and Purpose

The Veterans Volunteer Service has earned widespread admiration for its work, including from Canon Roger Hall, Chaplain to the Tower of London, who agreed to serve as the organisation's Patron.

His support has helped the Harts extend their vision beyond Littlehampton, with plans for further partnerships, expansion, and additional allotments in nearby towns



A Movement, not just a charity

As the Veterans Volunteer Service continues to grow, the Harts remain focused on impact, not image.

"We're not a big charity," says Poppy. "We're a movement – of people helping people, Veterans serving with pride, and communities learning from each other."

"We believe in quiet miracles," Gary adds. "Not flashy headlines – but real change in people's lives. That's what we're here for."

From the trenches of history to the fields of Yapton, from footballs at the Somme to food shared in a village hall, the VVS is proving that remembrance isn't just about looking back – it's about building forward.

"Open to Veterans, youth participants, and local families, the allotment provides a calming and productive space to grow food, friendships, and confidence."

VETERAN FORCE ANNOUNCES VVS AS ITS FIRST COMMUNITY EXEMPLAR

Veteran Force is delighted and honoured to announce Littlehampton-based Veterans Volunteer Service has become its first Community Exemplar.

Now a fully established charity, its remarkable work in the Littlehampton and surrounding communities – which now stretch to Brighton – has made VVS a remarkable local force for social resilience since its establishment by Gary Hart, formerly 3 Para, and his partner and wife Poppy, in 2022.

Veteran Force first met up with VVS late last year and ties between the two organisations have grown in recent months with the former increasingly helping to champion their work to a wider national audience through its media platform and campaign networks as the latter expands the range and depth of its services, creating an exemplary Veteran-led community action model which can be replicated around the country.



Scan the QR codes below to visit our YouTube channel and see the VVS Team in action at Fit 'n' Feed and YFG nights.



For further information check out:

www.veteransvolunteerservice.org.uk

Community First: How GSTT and Veteran Force Are Transforming Armed Forces Outreach in London

In a quiet corner of London on the third Tuesday of every month, something powerful happens.

Beneath the roof of Evelina House, camaraderie, care, and connection bloom in a space designed to serve those who've served us all.

This is the heart of the Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT) Armed Forces Community Outreach, an initiative that, since May 2022, has been supporting veterans, service personnel, and their families.

Building Bridges: Community & Partnerships

The monthly **Armed Forces Community Health & Wellbeing Drop-In** at Evelina House is more than just a support service – it's a hub of healing. Here, the GSTT Armed Forces team works shoulder-to-shoulder with partners such as **Veteran Force, SSAFA, Help for Heroes, Op RESTORE**, and many others, ensuring no one in the Armed Forces community slips through the cracks.

Reaching beyond Lambeth and Southwark, GSTT extends its support across Primary Care Networks (PCNs), GP surgeries, and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) in London.

Children of service families are not forgotten either. GSTT's engagement with Evelina Children's Hospital brings warmth and continuity of care to the youngest members of the Armed Forces community.

The initiative's deep roots are also visible in their regular presence at London AF Drop-ins, Breakfast Clubs, Bromley FC Veterans Drop-in, and the much-loved Chelsea Pensioners Outreach.

A Standard of Excellence

Recognition has followed this commitment to the Armed Forces Community. GSTT proudly holds the Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (2022) and is an officially Veteran Aware trust, recognised by the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA).

The renewal of the Armed Forces Covenant during Armistice 2021 reflects an enduring promise of fairness, dignity, and respect. GSTT also supports the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Veterans Friendly Accreditation, championing veteran-focused care across PCNs in Lambeth and Southwark.

GSTTs Vision 2025:

Better. Faster. Fairer.

Looking to the future, GSTT's Armed Forces outreach is laser-focused on three key goals:

Better

- Harnessing EPIC and natural language processing (NLP) tools to improve identification of Armed Forces patients
- Growing the internal Armed Forces staff network
- Elevating awareness and clinical capability among NHS staff
- Positioning GSTT as a national exemplar in Armed Forces healthcare through shared best practices

Faster

- Streamlining welfare support for quick, centralised access
- Creating clear employment and development pathways for veterans and serving personnel
- Boosting engagement across ICSs, PCNs, and GPs
- Deepening integration of welfare and clinical services across London

Fairer

- **Promoting equity in care access** for vulnerable and underserved Armed Forces populations
- Strengthening support for:
- **Patients** through holistic, tailored services
- **People** by investing in Armed Forces staff and networks
- **Partnerships** that bring the community together and amplify impact

Come Join the Conversation

If you're part of London's Armed Forces community—whether a veteran, currently serving, or a family member—come by the **Armed Forces Community Drop-In**. Held on the **third Tuesday of each month (11:00 – 14:00 hrs)**, the event offers a safe and welcoming environment to connect with support services, NHS staff, and fellow community members.

Location:

Ronald McDonald House Charities Evelina House
216 Lambeth Road, London, SE1 7JY
www.rmhc.org.uk/our-houses/evelina-london-house/

For more information please email: gstt.armedforces@nhs.net

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

PROUD SUPPORTER OF THE ARMED FORCES

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT) comprises five of the UK's best-known hospitals – **Guy's, St Thomas', Evelina London Children's Hospital, Royal Brompton and Harefield** – as well as community services in Lambeth and Southwark.

It has a long history of high-quality care, clinical excellence, research and innovation and is a proud supporter of the Armed Forces.

EMPLOYMENT

GSTT supports the employment of the Armed Forces community recognising military transferable skills and qualifications in our recruitment and selection process; working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) / Forces Employment Charity (FEC) to support the employment of Service leavers. The trust achieved the Employment Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Award in 2022.

NHS STEP INTO HEALTH

We support Step into Health - where members of the Armed Forces community can connect to NHS organisations to set up training opportunities, clinical and general work placements, insight days and receive application support.

GSTT ARMED FORCES & VETERANS NETWORK

We have a thriving diverse Armed Forces Network that reaches out regularly to the Armed Forces community in our Staff, Patients and wider community footprint across London with Staff forums, briefs, social events and community drop-ins.

LONDON ARMED FORCES NETWORKS

The GSTT Armed forces Team is active across multiple Armed Forces Networks across London and nationally.

ARMED FORCES AWARENESS TRAINING

We ensure that our staff are fully aware of the needs of the Armed Forces community by conducting the NHS Healthcare Awareness Training and Military Human CPD courses.

SERVICE SPOUSES AND PARTNERS

We connect with our Forces Families, and provide flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment.

RESERVES

We have a Reserves policy to support our employees who are members of the Reserve Forces; granting additional paid/unpaid leave for annual Reserve Forces training; supporting any mobilisations and deployment; actively encouraging members of staff to become Reservists.

CADET ORGANISATIONS

We have a policy to support our employees who are volunteer leaders in military cadet organisations, granting additional leave to attend annual training camps and courses; actively encouraging members of staff to become volunteer leaders in cadet organisations; supporting local military cadet units; recognising the benefits of employing cadets/ex-cadets within the workforce.

NATIONAL EVENTS

GSTT supports Armed Forces Day, Reserves Day, Jobs Fairs, conferences, Poppy Appeal Day and Remembrance activities.

ARMED FORCES CHARITIES

We support Armed Forces charities with fundraising and supporting staff who volunteer to assist.

VETERANS COVENANT HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

As a Veteran Aware Trust, we are leading the way in improving veterans' care within the NHS, as part of the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance (VCHA) we strive to be the exemplars in GSTT and the Community.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on LinkedIn - [Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Armed Forces Programme](#)

For more information please email: gstt.armedforces@nhs.net





UXO UK: HITLER'S LINGERING LEGACY

Alan Spence talks with IGNE UXO's Technical Field Manager Nigel Barton about the lingering legacy of unexploded ordnance littered around the UK following the Second World War and the company's role in managing and mitigating risk, especially for builders and developers.

"Any ordnance we find with an explosive quantity of eight kilograms or less we can deal with ourselves. Larger than that and it's a job for the military"



NIGEL BARTON
TECHNICAL FIELD MANAGER
IGNE

Eighty years on from the end of the Second World War, Hitler's attempt to bomb Britain into submission is still posing potential threats from unexploded ordnance (UXO) which has to be carefully investigated and managed by specialists working, where necessary, with Army bomb disposal experts.

Gillingham, Kent based IGNE UXO is a leader in this field where former British Army Warrant Officer Nigel Barton, a specialist in bomb detection and disposal, plies his trade as technical field manager, deploying knowledge and skills finely honed in Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"Estimates can vary," Barton says, "but probably around 60-70,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the UK by the Luftwaffe with around 10 per cent failing to detonate due to faulty and sabotaged (during their assembly) fuses, or from landing in soft ground or deep water".

"That means that there are thousands out there somewhere which pose potential threats".

But it doesn't stop there. During the war Britain established a huge array of anti-aircraft artillery defences which ranged from single gun emplacements to whole batteries in areas where the Luftwaffe, for example, habitually crossed the coastline and headed to targets inland – or in the vicinity of major cities where the armaments industry had key manufacturing plants.

As with unexploded German ordnance, anti-aircraft shells were sometimes prone to not exploding with the result they could simply disappear into mud or sand-dunes. Wide estuaries, such as those of the River Humber or the River Thames, were amongst areas where AAA batteries could face each other across the water.



Above : Police and Army bomb disposal officers with a defused German 1000kg 'Luftmine' (parachute mine) in Glasgow, 18 March 1941.

"Then there are discarded military training grounds which were not thoroughly cleared of ordnance after the war and some which still remain active where UXO shows up," Barton says.

"By their nature some of these sites were rural and quite isolated. It was only much later when commercial or new housing developments reached some of these areas that problems arose".

The classic news story about UXO usually involves an unexpected discovery of a bomb on a building site which workers almost unwittingly destroy themselves with a mechanical digger before someone catches on that it could be dangerous. The area is evacuated by the police and Army Bomb disposal experts rush to the scene.

This, or something like this, does indeed happen.

In December 2010, a 250kg German Unexploded Bomb (UXB) was discovered at around 4m below ground level during an upgrade project by Thames Water involving the excavation of the Beckton Sewage Treatment Works in East London.

Specialists from the Army's Royal Engineers were called in to assess the situation and a controlled detonation was carried out safely within a sealed off no-go perimeter involving road closures and evacuation of residents.

Depending on the circumstances, IGNE UXO can feature in the reactive response to such discoveries. However, its prime focus is on proactive detection, assessment, and mitigation of risks, usually during construction and land development projects in areas with historical bombing activity.

This involves:

- **conducting UXO risk assessments** based on historical records, aerial photography, and bombing density data to determine the likelihood and severity of encountering UXO on a specific site;
- **performing magnetometry surveys** (both non-intrusive and intrusive) to identify anomalies that may represent UXO threats;
- **mitigating risk by advising on safety protocols**, design modifications, or construction methods, supervising safe excavation procedures and providing standby UXO support during high-risk activities;
- **deploying UXO specialists to sites** during groundworks to manage any discoveries and coordinate with bomb disposal units if required.

"Any ordnance we find with an explosive quantity of eight kilograms or less we can deal with ourselves. Larger than that and it's a job for the military," says Barton.



For more information visit:

www.igne.com



FROM BATTLEFIELD TO CLASSROOM SUPPORTING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Garry Heeson's 29-year career in the Army Medical Services took him from Combat Medical Technician to Paramedic and Medical Support Officer, with deployments to Bosnia, Iraq, and Northern Ireland. Alongside his operational service, Garry actively pursued professional development, driven by a belief in lifelong learning and the need to prepare for life beyond the military.

When Garry joined the Army straight from sixth form, he didn't have GCSEs at grade C or above, but he did hold an NVQ Level 2 in Health and Social Care. Determined to improve his qualifications, he took every opportunity to gain civilian accreditation. This journey led him to earn a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) in Prehospital Care, a DipHE in Paramedic Practice, and eventually a BSc (Hons) in Developing Paramedic Practice. Later, while posted to the Defence Medical Academy, he also achieved a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Professional Practice), positioning himself for a transition into higher education.

Recognising the need to prepare for life after military service, Garry made a successful leap into academia and now works as a Senior Lecturer in Health Sciences. He remains closely connected to the military community, serving as Chair of the Armed Forces Community Network Group and Deputy Armed Forces Champion at the University of Sunderland.

Through these roles, Garry has helped shape a tailored academic offering: The Certificate of Higher Education in Health. This innovative, one-year, fully online course is specifically designed for serving

personnel, veterans, reservists, and military families, recognising both the challenges of military life and the wealth of experience it provides.

The course has been developed in partnership with HQ Army Medical Services and reflects the University's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award. Delivered by a team of veterans and reservists who understand the unique circumstances of military learners, it supports participants in transitioning to academic life and opens pathways to a variety of health-related honours degrees, both at Sunderland and beyond.

Modules include:

- Foundations of Health
- Health Project
- Numeracy for Health
- Study Skills for Health

These courses are designed to build confidence and academic readiness while acknowledging the professional and personal challenges students may face.

Financial Support and Accessibility

The course is financially accessible, registered with the Student Loans Company and eligible for the Ministry of Defence's Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Services (ELCAS), supporting service personnel in funding their education.

The Certificate of Higher Education in Health offers more than academic credit. It provides a supportive, understanding community tailored to the unique needs of the armed forces. Whether you're currently serving, transitioning to civilian life, or supporting a military partner, this course helps open the door to a rewarding future in healthcare.

Student Testimonial

Heather, a reservist and mother, highlights the course's flexibility:

"With the course being 100% online I'm able to fit it around my civilian work, reserve duties, and busy mum life. The assessments are scheduled in advance so I can prepare and meet deadlines. I'm using this course to build my UCAS application to study Paramedic Practice. Even if I don't go further, it's helped me immensely in my Combat Medic role and understanding health better in both professional and everyday life."



Heather Duncan
Student

Take the next step.

Join a learning community that values your service and supports your ambition. To learn more or apply, visit the University of Sunderland's website:

www.sunderland.ac.uk/study/short-courses-cpd/certificate-higher-education-health



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STUDY WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND

Take the next step in your career with the Certificate of Higher Education in Health.

Looking for a different challenge? We also offer a range of courses for current and former military personnel such as Business & Law, Engineering & Technology, Health Sciences, Education and Creative Arts.

We're registered with the Ministry of Defence's ELCAS Scheme, which provides financial support to eligible personnel studying at university, ensuring finance isn't a barrier to education. **Scan the QR code below for more information.**



Speak to our dedicated armed forces contact Nicola at:
armed.forces@sunderland.ac.uk

FIND OUT MORE
go.sunderland.ac.uk/armed-forces



Calling All Submariners

One year on since being founded, SUBS - Submariners United in Business - is pleased to announce a very special location for its first Anniversary - HMS Belfast.

Taking place on the evening of **Wednesday 10th September 2025**, this flagship event will bring together submariners from across the UK – those who have already transitioned into civilian careers, those preparing to leave service, and those simply exploring what opportunities are out there.

Founded by former submariner Danny Keating, SUBS has grown into a fast-moving national network built around a clear purpose: to connect those who served beneath the waves with those building their next chapter in business, entrepreneurship or new careers.

Over the past year, SUBS events have led to real job offers, commercial collaborations, and countless supportive conversations – proving that the submariner mindset translates powerfully into the world of work.

The anniversary event will take place in the Morgan Giles Suite and on the Boat Deck of HMS Belfast, offering a historic setting for an evening of meaningful introductions, shared stories, and professional networking.

Agenda highlights include:

- Welcome from the SUBS team
- 30-second introductions from all attendees
- Keynote guest speaker (to be announced)
- Sponsor spotlights from major UK businesses
- Structured and informal networking throughout

If you've served in submarines and are now in – or entering – the civilian world, this is the network for you. **Whether you're looking for ideas, opportunities, or simply a room full of like-minded people, this event is not to be missed.**



Scan the QR code and book your tickets now



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**For anyone even
thinking of joining,
don't hesitate.
It's one of the best
decisions I've made!**

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As a serving soldier you often come across the Chelsea Pensioners. They get invited to the mess. Although they were in the Army 20 or 30 years before you, they've done the same things. It doesn't change. You're singing off the same hymn sheet. When you've been soldiers, you have this bond.

When my wife died, I thought, "What am I doing knocking around in a three-bedroomed house? I don't like this. I'll apply to be a Chelsea Pensioner". I came down on a small recce first, because I knew someone who was living there. That first night I went with him to the Pensioners' club for a beer and as soon as I walked in the door I thought, "This is the place for me". It took me back 30 years to the Sergeants' mess. In my berth at night, I sometimes think of how many generations of Chelsea Pensioners have been here in these buildings before me.

My four-day trial stay was brilliant. Everyone stops and talks to you. During my interview they said, "Aren't you a bit young to come in here?". I said, "I can live independently, I'm not married and I'm in receipt of a state pension, so I meet your criteria. And you need people like me to cheer up those old ones!" For me, the best part is going out and representing the Royal Hospital. There's nothing else to worry about. The hardest thing is choosing what to have for lunch!



We are welcoming applications to become a Chelsea Pensioner

Contact our Admissions Team today.

Phone: **020 7881 5204**

Email: **admissions@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk**

Website: **www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk**



**Scan the QR code
for more information.**



**HOME OF THE
CHELSEA PENSIONERS**

One Person Joins, but the Whole Family Serves



The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity
is at the heart of supporting our Royal Navy,
Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary
personnel and their families,
past, present and future.



One Navy. One Family. By Your Side.

rnrmc.org.uk

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