Welcome to the autumn edition of The Bugle, Scottish War Blinded’s quarterly membership newsletter.

In the last edition of 2019, we focus on the theme of technology and how technology helps people to stay connected and fight isolation. In advance of Remembrance Day, we feature two members who share their experience of serving during World War Two. We also share top tips, updates from Scottish War Blinded, and more.

The Bugle is available in the following formats:

- Email - large print
- Post – large print
- Audio – USB (return envelope provided)
- Audio – CD (does not need to be returned)

If you would like to receive future editions of The Bugle in a different format, please contact Eilidh. Alternatively, please contact your Outreach Worker.

You can contact Scottish War Blinded’s Membership Communications and Engagement Executive, Eilidh, by phone or email.

Eilidh writes The Bugle, as well as the recently introduced bi-annual regional newsletters, The Honour and E-News.

As well as keeping you up to date through newsletters, Eilidh manages the new members’ Facebook group and engagement projects, such as the recent 500-mile challenge.

Here is how to get in touch:

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Member keeps his Independence thanks to Synapptic Devices

Army Veteran John Kinnis, aged 81, shares his experiences of retaining his independence thanks to Synapptic software on his mobile phone and tablet.

John hopes that his story and knowledge on Synapptic software will inspire and encourage more Scottish War Blinded members to embrace technology after sight loss.

The father-of-one and grandfather-of-two has always had an interest in technology and enjoyed a long career in the television industry, working as a Television Engineer before turning his hand to lecturing.

“My background in computing goes right back to the early days of the BBC computer, so that’s a long, long time ago,” John says. “I used to fault find, but you don’t do that nowadays.

“I worked in the television studios and did camera work as well as the setting up of the pictures, so it’s a big thing for me to have lost my eyesight so much. My eyesight used to be exceptionally good.

“I can’t watch the television now, but I still enjoy listening to it.”

John was diagnosed with glaucoma many years ago and describes his sight as “one step away from being totally blind”. He was first introduced to the accessible software, Synapptic, two years ago when he received a tablet from Scottish War Blinded’s rehabilitation team.

John explains: “Synapptic is a programme which is designed for people with a visual impairment to help them to use a phone or tablet with ease. It speaks as well as having the large print on the screen. It’s very handy for us.

“With Synapptic, once the programme is activated it brings up a main menu where I can press the down arrow to change the pages. To go back, all I have to do is press the top arrow. The pages always stay the same so I know where things are. I can also add different programmes and Apps.

“It’s only in the last three years that my sight has given me a lot of trouble and I could no longer see to use a standard mobile phone.”

John quickly found that, with the use of his new Synapptic tablet, he was able to stay more connected to his family and use the internet.
Reaping the benefits of the tablet, John then received a Synapptic mobile phone from Blind Veterans UK the following year.

“Now that I have the Synapptic tablet and phone, I’m able to continue to do things that I was doing before when my eyesight was better,” says John. “If it wasn’t for Synapptic, I wouldn’t be able to message my family.”

As well as keeping in touch with family and friends, John finds that these Synapptic devices allow him to remain more independent at home. He says:

“I’m on my own at home now, so having the Synapptic phone and tablet without a doubt helps me to feel less isolated. There are lots of handy facilities on my tablet and phone. I can do online shopping and look up information, as well as check the weather and my emails.

“I can also leave voice notes which I use to set myself reminders like I would a diary.
“With the screen being bigger on the tablet, it means I can use the keyboard to type as I can see the letters more easily.

“And there is a dictation feature so I can speak to the tablet and phone and it will type what I’m saying. It reads my message back to me and I’m able to correct any mistakes before I send it. It’s a very clever thing!”

It can sometimes take a while to learn all the various functions that come with Synapptic software and John says it was his determination that motivated him to learn:

“I had sheer determination to learn to use the tablet and the phone, and having determination does a lot for people.”

It was with this determination that John was inspired to write a special guide on how to use Synapptic devices for his fellow Scottish War Blinded members.

If you have a Synapptic device and could benefit from John’s guide, please contact Head Office on 0131 229 1456 or enquiries@scottishwarblinded.org to request a copy.

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**Computer Magnification System enables Member to Stay Connected**

Scottish War Blinded member, Alan Reid, is using a computer magnification and reading programme to allow him to stay connected to the sight loss community.

Alan, aged 62, had worked with computers for many years during his career as a Clerical Officer at the Armed Forces Pension Scheme in Glasgow. When he was diagnosed with macular degeneration in 2004, his 15-year career was brought to an abrupt end.

“I tried to carry on working after I was diagnosed, but I had to leave because I couldn’t see to do the job. The first thing I did was attend a course on how to use a computer with sight loss,” said Alan.

Alan, from Neilston, started using Zoomtext in 2005, which Alan explained is “a magnification system which can also be used as a reader system.”

Alan uses the computer to allow him to stay connected to the sight loss community, as well as research the latest developments in macular degeneration.
“Being able to use a computer has allowed me to keep in touch with other people and organisations,” said Alan. “Since using Zoomtext, I’ve been able to build a network of people I stay connected with.

“With Zoomtext, I can change the colour of the background and text, the font and cursor size and the way I can scroll through the pages.”

Alan, who has been a member of Scottish War Blinded since 2012, added: “When I changed my computer to Windows 10, the previous version of Zoomtext was no longer supported.

“I asked Anne [my Outreach Worker], if it would be possible for Scottish War Blinded to fund the updated version and it was. I got ten years out of the previous version so I can’t complain!

“Zoomtext is infinitely adjustable as I can tailor it to my own needs. No matter how my eyes deteriorate, I can always use it. Even if I was to completely lose my sight, I could use the reader function although I would have to learn to touch type.”
The computer software also allows the Army veteran, who lives alone, to remain independent and read his own mail.

“I can’t see to read or write letters, but I’m able to scan letters I receive in the post to the computer so I can read them using the magnifier or reader function. I can also use emails as it reads them out to me and tells me what I’m typing,” explained Alan.

Alan is using Zoomtext to help him to research the latest developments in macular degeneration, which allows him to pass on his knowledge to others who have been diagnosed with the condition.

Alan is very involved in the sight loss community and is an active volunteer with the Macular Society. “I run the Glasgow group and assist with another three groups. I also do displays and talks about macular degeneration to other organisations. It keeps me busy.

“I like being able to talk to people with the same condition so they understand that they are not alone. I can relate to them and they can relate to me. I like being able to help them to bypass lots of problems and find different ways of doing things,” he said.

Alan’s father was diagnosed with macular degeneration in the 1990s, at which point Alan turned to the internet to seek advice on the condition. “I used the computer a lot to research more about the disease,” he said.

“When I was diagnosed, it meant I had a good idea of what was going to happen. I was told I had macular degeneration and I was going to go blind, but no one told me it was unlikely that I would go completely blind as you still have peripheral vision. That would have been useful.

“Although I can’t see to read and write properly, or see people’s faces, or read maps and street signs or drive, you still need to use what you’ve got.”

Alan has received a range of equipment from Scottish War Blinded and occasionally attends the Hawkhead Centre in Paisley. He said: “Scottish War Blinded provides a safety net. I have something to fall back on rather than just sitting in the house.

“They’ve helped with IT problems I have had, and the rehabilitation team has also been a great help.”

If you would like to find out more about technology that can help you, please speak to your Outreach Worker who will be happy to help.
Members Experience a ‘Different World’ thanks to Innovative piece of Immersive Technology

Members at the Linburn Centre are embracing the latest technology with the introduction of a virtual reality (VR) system.

Virtual reality is the latest craze in the technology world, and members of Scottish War Blinded are experiencing why VR has become so popular for themselves. VR uses computers to create a simulated environment which can imitate real life, or create an environment completely different from the real world.

VR was introduced at the Linburn Centre in June this year after IT Instructor, Brian Wilson, experienced the benefits for himself. Brian said: “Initially I wanted to get it at the Centre to give members a bit of fun. Soon after I discovered the positive impact it is having as it provides a bit of escapism and relaxation. Members are forgetting about their worries for a while.

“With VR, you can do almost anything; from games to travel. Members can go to Hawaii and spend time on the beach.”

Derek Meechan attends the Linburn Centre once per week and is making the most of the IT room’s latest gadget. “VR is a different world. Coming to Linburn and using VR is the best day of the week,” said the 57-year-old.

“When I first tried VR I just thought wow. I’d heard of it before but I had no idea how realistic it would be. “It doesn’t feel like you’re anywhere else. When I’m wearing the headset, I completely forget about everything else.”

The Army veteran suffered a stroke in 2012 which has affected the signals reaching the left-hand side of his body. “The main benefit for me is the willingness to want to move my arm,” Derek said.

A game involving aiming and shooting inanimate objects is a firm favourite.

“The shooting game is my favourite because it’s really interactive and makes me want to use my left hand to shoot the objects,” explained Derek.

“The games make me use my brain as I’m having to think about different tactics.”
As well as games, members are able to virtually travel to different locations around the world. Derek said: “One of the games makes you feel like you’re on a canoe going through the Grand Canyon.

“I feel so immersed that when I reach down it feels like I’m running my hand through the water. It makes me want to jump in and go for a swim!

“I’ve always wanted to go to the Grand Canyon and VR allows me to feel like I’m there.”

World War Two veteran, John McOwan, is also embracing Linburn’s newest piece of tech. Despite his limited sight, the 98-year-old has been particularly enjoying donning the VR headset to undertake some of the ‘relaxation’ experiences.

John said: “I love gadgets, I’m into all of them, and I’ve become quite addicted to this! I find it very relaxing – it is escapism.

“My favourite environment is the Grand Canyon app, where you float along water around the Grand Canyon. I used to go fishing and this reminds me of that.”
Bryce Campbell, aged 86, describes VR as “fascinating.” Due to significant sight loss, the Army veteran never expected to be able to experience a virtual environment.

Bryce said: “When I put the headset on, I was shocked. I shouldn’t have been able to see and experience anything in the third dimension.

“I was aware of something coming towards me and I actually ducked. That’s ridiculous, I never thought I would have been so aware of what was on the screen.

“It’s a wonderful piece of tech. I’m seeing things I never thought I would again.

“I took the headset off and had a massive grin plastered over my face.”

VR has proved a big hit with members of Scottish War Blinded and with so many games and virtual environments available to try, there is something for everyone.

VR is available at the Linburn Centre in West Lothian. If you don’t attend the Linburn Centre and would like to give VR a try, you can experience it during a visit to the Gardeners Cottage or a day trip to the Centre.

Member uses Technology to get back into the ‘Real World’

A Scottish War Blinded member who regularly attends the Hawkhead Centre is using his digital devices to help him to cope with sight loss.

Andrew McGaw, from Paisley, has macular degeneration and has said that technology has helped him to “get back into the real world.”

The RAF veteran has a desktop computer at home, as well as using Synapptic devices which he says have “opened up a whole new world”.

“I use my computer at home for emails, skype, browsing the internet and keeping banking records. I use it to its full extent.

“I use the built in magnifier to allow me to see the screen,” he explained.

The father-of-two and grandfather-of-two used to be a keen photographer but gave up his hobby due to his deteriorating sight loss. “I can’t see prints anymore but can still make out digital images, so I can use the computer to look up photographs,” he said.

Scottish War Blinded provided Andrew with a Synapptic phone last year.
Andrew said: “The Synapptic phone is a revelation.

“With my previous standard phone, all I could do was answer phone calls. I couldn’t see the screen to do anything else, so texting was a mystery to me.

“The phone is like a mini computer. I can do everything on it.”

Andrew attends the Hawkhead Centre twice a week and can often be found in the IT suite with IT Instructor, Jason. “I spend a lot of time in IT, more than I should!” he laughed.

“I like to do my own thing and I know that if I get stuck, Jason is there to help.”

The 85-year old enjoys finding new ways of using any technology he owns and says he is “always learning.”

And when his sight loss meant he was no longer able to watch television, Andrew got creative with technology once again to allow him to continue to enjoy his favourite programmes. “I have a projector linked to my TV so I can watch the sport channels,” he said.

“When I watched football on a standard TV, I couldn’t see the ball so it was a bit of a nonsense.

“Now the screen projects on to the wall so I can keep up with everything that is happening.

“With sight loss, the biggest problem is staying connected to the world.

“Being able to use the computer has helped me to cope with my sight loss.”

Andrew has reaped the benefits of using technology to help him to stay independent and continue his hobbies.

When Andrew is at the Centre, he is always on-hand to assist IT instructor Jason with any computer questions from his fellow members.

“When I’m in the IT suite at the Centre, I help other members to use the computer as well,” he added.

“I can put myself in their place so they’re receptive to listening to me.

“I like to encourage fellow members to make the most out of technology.”
Members Share their Experiences in Advance of Remembrance Day

World War Two Veteran who Lived through Battle of St Valery, Prisoner of War Camps and Death March shares his Experience

A World War Two veteran who lived through the 1940 Battle for Saint-Valéry-en-Caux and five years as a prisoner of war recalls his experience of life during World War Two.

James ‘Jimmy’ Johnstone, now 98, of Aberdeen, was just 16-and-a-half when he enlisted with the Royal Engineers in 1937.

In 1939, he was called up as part of the 51st Highland Division and journeyed to France, where in June 1940 he survived fighting at St Valéry as it was bombarded by Nazi forces, and was taken by the Germans as a prisoner of war with thousands of his fellow soldiers.

Jimmy survived five years as a prisoner of war, predominantly spent at the camp Stalag XXB, Marienburg, and concluding with an unimaginable ‘death march’ of hundreds of miles through freezing temperatures as the German army succumbed to the Allied invasion.

Here, Jimmy shares his incredible story, which includes two daring attempts to escape the Nazis.

St Valéry, June 1940

Jimmy said: “The German army was far better trained than us. We were on the retreat until Dunkirk. “The 51st Highland Division was kept on to fight the German army on their own with the French while the majority of the British troops were evacuated at Dunkirk. A lot of people don’t know that. It hurts me.

“We went all the way back to St Valéry. It’s a little town in the valley, so the Germans had their tanks on the top of the cliffs and had their planes. We were shelled – you have no idea.

“I was actually wounded in the chest – shot. I’ve got a nick in my ear too. I was young, a bit foolish and brave.”

After days of fighting, Major General Fortune, surrendered the 51st Highland Division, and over a period of around three weeks Jimmy and thousands of soldiers were marched to Germany via Belgium and Holland.

Travelling by foot, trains in cattle trucks and on canal barges, he was lucky to survive the horrific
conditions of the journey.
Jimmy said: “In Holland we were taken out of the cattle trucks and put onto canal coal barges.
“We were marched all the way.
“I remember a French woman had put some pales of water out for us to drink, but the German guards just knocked them over. The only drop of water we could try to get was at duck ponds.

“We marched all day and the only break was at night. We slept in fields out in the open. We were covered in lice, it was horrible.
“While we made our way through Germany – I’m sure it was in Hildesheim – I remember they marched us through the street. Our clothes were rags, we were covered in lice, unshaven. ‘This is the British army,’ they said. A woman spat in my face.

Image on the left shows Jimmy as a teenager and now, on the right, aged 98
“You couldn’t do anything. We were helpless.
“We were once again transferred to cattle trucks. For three whole days we were in there, travelling over to Poland. If you wanted to do your business, you hadn’t any room. People died on that train.”

**Life in a prisoner of war camp**

On arrival in Thorn, Poland, Jimmy was deloused and completely shaved at prisoner of war camp Stalag XXA. He spent a year in slave labour, before he was moved to another POW camp – Stalag XXB in Marienburg – where he was again put to work.

He said: “We arrived in Thorn, and were sent up to an old Polish Army fort. We were shaved completely, completely bare. We were given fresh trousers, a tunic, hat and clogs.

“There were thousands of us in the camps. My prisoner of war number was 14320 – I still remember it now. My friend from Inverclyde – I cannot remember his name – was given the number 14321, and as the Germans counted out groups they stopped at 14320, so he stayed in Thorn but I was transferred to Stalag XXB in Marienburg. It was sad.

“They had us working on farms, bridges and coal mines. I was lucky to not be working in the mine. I was working on top of it, loading the coal onto trucks.

“All you were given to eat was just watery soup and a German loaf between five men. We worked every day for 12 hours. The guards always watched over us.

“To start with we were sleeping on the sandy ground in a big marque. Later we had bunk beds. During the night the lice were murder.”

In June 1943, Jimmy managed to go on the run for a fortnight with his friend who was also a prisoner of war, Jackie Lockwood. They disguised themselves as Polish civilians, who then had to wear a letter ‘P’ on their clothing. But when they were later captured, Jimmy never saw Jackie again.

Jimmy said: “At the camp there was a committee in charge of escaping. So if you had a plan to escape, they would collect vitamin tablets, chocolate, stuff like that for you.

“I had a friend who was Polish, and I asked him if there was any chance of getting two ‘P’ s for myself and my friend, Jackie Lockwood. He got hold of them and some overalls – we sewed the ‘P’ badges on.

“We were on the run for two weeks, disguised as Polish civilians.
One occasion we jumped on a train and a German inspector came through to check tickets. He just looked at us and saw the ‘P’ badges.

“The weather was fine but Jackie and I slept in a little outhouse. One day we were walking down a main road and there were some workmen doing some repairs on the road. We called out, ‘Guten Morgen’ and ‘Heil Hitler’, but when we went back to the outhouse I mentioned to Jackie I thought we were being watched.

“Shortly afterwards two German police officers pulled up and asked why we were there. We had to say we’d escaped. They took us back and put us in a cell. They came in with food, and one inspector returned and said, ‘You have to be admired. You were doing your duty as a soldier by escaping.’

“We had this admiration from them. We got fed by them and got a bath. But then they got in touch with the camp guards. When they arrived it was rifle butts into our backs.

“Back at the camp they had a place they called ‘the cooler’. It was a cell with a stone floor. There was a little vent with bars to allow air in. Very dark. I spent 14 days in there alone. It was murder. A horrible place.

“I don’t know what happened to Jackie. I never saw him again.”

**The March**

In the early hours of January 1945, with the German army feeling the pressure of Russian forces, Jimmy and thousands of prisoners of war were forced to march hundreds of miles back into Germany. Extremely malnourished and freezing cold, it was on this death march that Jimmy attempted a second dash for freedom with three other British prisoners of war: Gerald Fury, Bert Petrie and Jim Watt.

He said: “We were only aware of what was happening towards the end of the march.

“‘It was -28c, freezing cold. If you fell by the roadside because you couldn’t cope or keep up, you were just shot.

“During the March, it must have been early April 1945, one of the German guards, who said he had been a prisoner of war in Scotland during World War One, spoke to me. The guards with us were all older guards and no longer able to fight. This older guard couldn’t speak a word of English, so we spoke in German. He said to me, ‘You give me a note saying I have been a good guard, and I will take..."
you and your friends to this farm house I know.’

“I wrote a note that actually said he ought to get a boot up the behind, but he thought I’d written a nice note. He was so happy and put it in his pocket.

“He took me and three friends away to this farm. It was dark and wet. Three days we were there. Then we heard the Russian advance of shells and the bombs firing at us, so the guard told us we’d have to go. So many bullets.

“When the Americans freed the troops, I remember this American sergeant took the old guard and gave him a right doing over. But now I feel so sorry for that old guard. I regret writing that note now. I believe in the Bible and forgiveness. But at that time after being a prisoner of war for all that time that’s how I’d felt.”

Freed by American soldiers, Jimmy says he will “never forget” the feeling of eating the piece of real food – a piece of white bread – the troops gave him.

**Return to Scotland**

Jimmy explained: “I had six weeks leave when I got home, then all the ex-prisoners of war were taken down to Haywards Heath in England. They wanted to know what effect being a prisoner of war had on the mind after all those years. There were a lot of stupid questions. I remember a boy at the back who shouted out and said, ‘Listen, I was quite sane when I came in here, but after all these daft questions...!’

“I was passed as 100 per cent fit and I was due to be sent to Japan – but the atom bomb was dropped so that was cancelled.

“I’d been home three or four years, and one Saturday afternoon an officer appeared at my door. He said. ‘Mr Johnstone, the Royal Engineers Territorial Army are on the up again and we’re looking for experienced soldiers.’

“I joined up again and finished up as a Sergeant. When I was young I was army daft. Even after all we’d been through the will to live was still there. I know that’s incredible.

“A lot of people say I have lead a very unusual, interesting life. I have lived.”

The veteran went on to enjoy careers in the postal service and as a civil servant. “I felt helmed in, and enjoyed jobs which got me out and about.

“After my experience as a POW, no way could I sit at a desk for eight hours,” he explained.
Part One: Merchant Navy Veteran who Sailed the seas during World War Two as part of Artic Convoys Relives his Experience of Life at Sea

In January 1943, David Craig, then aged 17, stepped aboard a ship which was set for Russia. He had joined the Merchant Navy Dover Hill Ship having just graduated from the Caledonian Wireless College as a Radio Officer.

Here, David, now aged 94, shares his experiences of life on board one of the Artic convoys of World War Two as they carried supplies across unforgiving terrain to Russia.

Life on-board Convoy JW53 - Scotland to Russia

David, originally of Nairn, had the sea running through his veins and knew that he was destined for a life on the open water. Aged 15, the young teenager set for sea as a navigation apprentice in the Merchant Navy. However, his journey was short lived due to colour blindness, meaning he could no longer continue with the navigation branch. Young and undeterred, David still had his sights set on the sea and discovered that he could work as a radio officer and still be a part of the Navy.

David, who says he had ‘itchy feet without a deck under my feet’, joined the Dover Hill in Gourock as the third Radio Officer on his first official trip on 13 January, just before his eighteenth birthday. “I didn’t know we were headed for Russia until I was on the ship. I thought ‘just my luck’,” said the father-of-two.

The ship headed to Loch Ewe 10 days later to form convoy JW53, where 28 allied ships gathered to join. On 15 February 1943, the heavily defended convoy headed for Murmansk, Russia.

“I didn’t know how bad it was at the time as it was all hushed up,” said David.

“I didn’t realise how many ships we were losing.

“We weren’t told anything about why we were going to Russia. When you joined a ship, you just went where the ship went.”

David, whose role earned him the nickname ‘Sparks’, was responsible for all visual signals. He stood at the action station on the highest point of the ship with the Captain and used an Aldis lamp and Morse code to communicate with other ships.
“We were heavily loaded with fighter aircraft, tanks, guns, lorries and a large tonnage of shells and high explosives in the number one hold,” he said. “It was a very dangerous cargo to have, but we had it and that was it.

“Our deck cargo was made up of lorries in cases, Matilda tanks and drums of lubricating oil covered with a layer of sandbags to protect them from tracer bullets. There were explosives underneath the deck, so needless to say we were not very happy.”

Image on the left shows David aged 18 and now, on the right, aged 94. The convoy, which was made up of three cruisers, an anti-aircraft cruiser, an escort carrier, 16 destroyers, two minesweepers, three corvettes and two trawlers, faced many challenges on their treacherous journey in the biting winter temperatures.
David said: “It wasn’t a direct route as we had to go way out into the Atlantic to get as far away from Norway as possible to get out of range from the German planes. “That was the bother when we got closer to Russia as we were back in range. “The weather was very cold on the way there and the ships were all coated in ice. “We had a lot of heavy clothes on. We had heavy underclothes to start with and a sleeveless jerkin made of sheepskin with fur inside which we wore on top. “On top of that we had a duffle coat which was canvas on the outside and sheepskin on the inside. Then we had a hood and a fur hat. We were also provided with visors which would go over our head with holes just for the eyes, but no one would use them because our breath froze and we ended up with a cake of ice on the inside.” The bad weather went from bad to worse as the convoy found themselves in the midst of a “vicious” hurricane that lasted three days. “All we could do was try to stay alive,” said the grandfather of four and great-grandfather of 10. “I had never been in a hurricane before and I never wanted to be in one again. “The biggest challenge was staying on our feet. The ship was covered in ice so we had to skate along the decks. To get to our accommodation, we had to wait until the ship rolled a certain way so we could skate along the side of the hatch and get in. If we missed we went back and into a rail. “Six ships, a cruiser and our aircraft carrier were all damaged and had to head back to Iceland. “We lost most of our cargo. All of the oil drums went over the side which we were delighted to see go. But we also lost lorries and crates, they got smashed with the weather and ended up going over the side. I’ve never seen seas like it. “We managed to save the tanks and kept on battering our way northwards.” The severe weather conditions brought additional communication challenges. David recalls: “I remember trying to use an Aldis lamp to signal a corvette and found it very difficult. One minute she was in sight and then she would go down the trough of a wave, then she would come up
and our ship would go down and all that could be seen was the water.

“At one stage, the convoy was well scattered but as the weather moderated the Navy rounded us up and got us into some semblance of order again.”

When the hurricane had eased, the sailors didn’t have much time to recuperate as, with the loss of their escort carrier, the convoy had no air cover and was susceptible to attack.

“A few days after the hurricane, a German spotter plane arrived and flew round the convoy during daylight hours to keep an eye on us,” David said. “The cat was out of the bag.

“The next day, the cruiser ship called us up by signal lamp to tell us that enemy aircraft were approaching from such and such a direction, so we got our glasses to see what was going on and counted three formations of seven planes. That’s 21 JU88 German bombers.

“All the bomb doors opened and they picked a ship each, of course the one that came for us came from straight ahead. Four bombs in a bunch came right toward us.

“We knew there was nothing on earth we could do about it. If you were wise, you said a very quick prayer then you ducked,” David said with a small laugh.

Miraculously David’s ship survived the bombing, despite sustaining damage.

“It wasn’t our time to die and we all felt very fortunate,” he said.

Arrival in Russia: “I knew my time hadn’t come.”

On February 27 1943, convoy JW53 reached Russia, arriving at Kola Inlet, north of the city of Murmansk. The merchant ships anchored at Polyarno, a Russian naval base, where the escorts left and headed back to Scotland with another convoy.

After several weeks at sea in treacherous conditions, the exhausted sailors set off in their ships up the Kola inlet one by one toward Murmansk, all hopeful of some well-deserved rest.

“When we were under attack, we were always working, either at an action station or on standby, so we got very tired. When we got to Russia, we didn’t know what was ahead of us and we were silly enough to think we would be able to get a good night’s sleep,” explained David.

“About a mile up the inlet, we passed a merchant ship on fire and
her crew taking to lifeboats.

“We anchored in Murmansk to discharge our cargo and the port was being bombed a good part of the time. The day came to discharge cargo and were very fortunate that we weren’t damaged by bombs there.

“One ship was sunk alongside the quay, although it wasn’t too deep so she just sat at the bottom. The crew just went ashore down the gangway.

“Best sinking I’ve ever seen in my life, the crew didn’t even get their feet wet,” he laughed.

“When we had discharged our cargo, we moved out to let other ships into the quay. Five or six ships anchored down the side of the inlet, which reminded me of Loch Long but wider and surrounded by hills.

“This suited the Germans fine because they couldn’t have got any better targets!

“The German lines were only about 10 miles away so we were regularly attacked by ME109 fighter-bombers. Our gunners were very skilled and opened fire only when the planes came well within range.

“These attacks only lasted for about a minute but were very vicious and

we had gunners wounded and damage done to our ship.

“We shot down one plane and on another occasion we damaged one which flew out of range before we could finish it off. The ship anchored astern of us then opened fire when the damaged plane came within range and it blew up. We only got a half credit for that one so ended up with one-and-a-half swastikas painted on our funnel.

“We were always in and out for repairs. If it was snowing or foggy, we got peace so the horrible weather suited us fine,” said David.

The sailors spent three months at the Kola inlet, all the while not knowing how long it would be before they could return home – and it was months before their families got word that they were safe in a foreign port.

On 4 April 1943, the Dover Hill merchant ship, with David aboard, came under attack once again...

Stay tuned for part two of David’s story which will be published in the Winter edition of The Bugle in January.
Guide to Staying Safe Online

Using the internet comes with an array of benefits; from keeping in touch with friends and family to shopping from the comfort of your own home.

The internet has only been widely available for little over two decades, and although internet was used in the workplace prior, it wasn’t until the early 2000s when the internet was commonly used at home.

Fast forward to 2019 and the internet is a massive part of a daily routine for many. The internet is available across a range of devices and is used in many aspects of day-to-day life, but like anything, precautions need to be taken in order to stay safe whilst online.

So, how do you make the most of the internet whilst ensuring your personal information is safe and secure? Here, we share our top-tips for staying safe online:

Passwords:
To ensure your personal information is secure, it is important to have strong passwords in case your device is lost or stolen.

- It is recommended that passwords are at least 12 characters long and contain lower and upper case letters, numbers and special characters, such as an exclamation or question mark
- Use a different password for each account for extra protection. If it helps, keep a note of your passwords in a secure place away from your device
- Keep your device locked when it’s not in use

Using your bank card
Providing bank details online is very common and, for the most part, secure. But, as always, there are certain things to be vigilant of.

- If you’re shopping online, only provide your bank details to reputable sites you know and trust
- When providing bank details, only save your details on your personal computer. Never save your personal details if you are using a public computer

When providing any personal details on a website, check the web address at the top of the page for a padlock symbol as this indicates a secure connection
• As well as the padlock symbol, all secure sites have 'https://' at the start of the web address
• Online banking is very safe and secure as you have to provide additional security measures to allow you to access your information. However, always ensure you are on the legitimate site as spoof sites can occasionally exist

Avoiding Scams
In the last edition of The Bugle, we spoke about how to avoid scam letters and phone calls. Scam communications unfortunately exist in the online world as well, so here’s what to look out for:
• First of all, avoid anything that seems too good to be true because it probably is
• When browsing the internet, ignore pop-ups and never click on any links or enter personal information
• If you receive an email which you haven’t subscribed to or looks suspicious, mark it as junk or spam and delete the email
• Only click on a link in an email if it has been sent from a trustworthy source and always check the sender’s email address

• If you are unsure about an email, verify the email by searching online for contact details and calling to confirm the email. If you’re unsure, do not use the contact details listed in the email. Instead, search for contact information independently

Social Media:
The internet provides endless opportunities for people to communicate with each other, and at Scottish War Blinded, we love keeping our members up to date via email newsletters and Facebook.
• When using social media, such as Facebook, set your privacy settings to ‘private’ to ensure only those you are friends with can see any of your posts
• Compare social media to real life. You would never share your personal information with a stranger at a bus stop, so don’t share it online either

Scottish War Blinded recently set up a Facebook group for members and their friends and family. This is a safe group which provides an online community for our members, where you can interact with one another and see a range of pictures from across the organisation.
Search for ‘Members and Friends of Scottish War Blinded’ on Facebook and request to join to become part of our private community.

**Triple Tap Tech**

In an ever-emerging world of new technology and gadgets, it is difficult to know exactly what is available and how it can help with your individual needs.

That’s where Triple Tap Tech comes in. Triple Tap Tech is a charity which provides advice, help, support and training in using technology specific to those with a visual impairment.

Triple Tap Tech aims to enhance the lives of visually impaired people throughout Scotland through the use of technology; whether that’s a smartphone, tablet, laptop, smart TV, smart speaker or any other digital device you may use.

The charity is based in Glasgow and operates throughout Scotland, so no matter where you live, you can benefit from their support.

One Scottish War Blinded member to have benefitted from support from Triple Tach Tech is Bill Bruce from Cumbernauld.

The 81-year-old has received regular support from Triple Tap Tech for two years. Bill said: “Triple Tap Tech is very good as they travel around and make home visits.

“I first met the guys at Triple Tap Tech at Visibility as they used to hold regular tech classes. I went every week to learn more about my phone and my iPad.

“When I couldn’t get my Amazon Echo to work, Triple Tap Tech came to my house to help me. They were able to resolve the problem so now my Alexa works a treat.

“I think Triple Tap Tech is particularly beneficial for older people. I’ve found them very helpful and I’m always recommending them to others I meet. They’re first class.”

If you could benefit from support from Triple Tap Tech, get in touch with them directly by calling 0141 353 1567/ 07805 353 149 or email tripletaptech@outlook.com.
TV Licence – Important Update for over 75s

Currently, the government funds free TV licences for those over the age of 75. This is set to change. From 1 June 2020, a new scheme is being introduced which means that those aged 75 or older do not automatically qualify for a free TV Licence.

Here’s what you need to know to ensure there are no surprises:

Pension Credit
- If you receive pension credit, you will be unaffected by the change and will continue to receive a free TV Licence. The BBC will write to you before your current licence expires to let you know how to apply for a new free licence
- If you currently have a free over 75 TV Licence but do not receive Pension Credit, you will have to pay for your TV Licence from June next year. The BBC states that you will stay licenced until 31 May 2020 and they will write to you in good time to explain how you can pay for your new licence
- The household is licenced, not the individual. So if you are under the age of 75 and/or do not receive Pension Credit but live with someone who does, the BBC states that ‘you can transfer the licence to the name of the person in the household who receives Pension Credit and apply for a free TV licence’. The BBC will write to you before the new scheme comes into place

Blind Concession
- If you are registered as blind or severely sight impaired (SSI) you will get a 50% discount on the cost of a TV licence
- To be eligible for the discount, you will need to provide a copy of the certificate or document issued by or on behalf of your local authority or a copy of the certificate from your ophthalmologist
- Those who are partially sighted do not qualify
- If your digital box is only used to produce sounds and can’t display TV programmes, you don’t need a TV Licence

The cost of an annual TV licence is £154.40; this can be paid in one lump sum or in instalments.

If you would like to find out more information or have any queries, please visit www.tvlicencing.co.uk or call 0300 555 0286.
Poetry by Dave Phillips

In the autumn edition of The Bugle, we feature another poem from Scottish War Blinded’s resident poet, Dave Phillips.

‘Turn a Blind Eye’ is another poem from his collection, ‘The Eyes Have It’, which explores the mixed emotions felt by people with sight loss.

“Immediately after being medically discharged from the RAF and losing my job and driving licence, I embarked on about three years of hitch-hiking throughout the UK and Europe, filling my mind with sights with the idea that, should I ever go totally blind, I’ll have a catalogue of images in my mind,” said Dave.

The third poem in his collection, ‘Turn a Blind Eye’ further explores Dave’s mental and physical journey since being diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) aged 25.

Turn a Blind Eye

I’m losing my sight
I can no longer see
In the dark or at night

You may notice me
Stumbling around
Arms stretched out ahead

Perhaps by a friend
I am carefully led

Away from all obstacles
That may do me harm
Guided to safety
An arm on my arm

It’s a gradual thing
Years in the making
Sometimes I gaze
At the photos I’m taking

And laugh at the thought
That their joy will be lost
For photos are never
As Braille embossed

Yet the pictures I’ve taken
The things I have seen
Shall not be forsaken
Or ever wiped clean

From my travellers mind
Where memories dwell
To be seen despite darkness
Their stories to tell

Dave shares his work on his Facebook page, ‘Plainverse, the poetry of Dave Phillips’ and we will continue to feature his poems in future editions of The Bugle.
Quality Assurance Survey 2019

Many thanks to all our members who filled in and sent back their quality assurance survey this year. We are delighted to have had almost a 30% response rate, which is exceptionally good.

The information you gave us about your experiences of having sight problems is invaluable as we look at what we do to support you and whether we are making a difference.

Most important of all is the fact that you are happy with what we do.

The answers you gave us showed that:

- 80.6% of you are extremely satisfied
- 18.8% of you are satisfied
- 0.6%, just two members, are dissatisfied

As in other years, you said that the top three things we do that help you most are:

- Providing equipment to help with your sight impairment
- Providing information and advice
- Helping you meet other people

All these things are key to what Scottish War Blinded aims to do, which is help you to stay as independent as possible. It is particularly positive that three quarters of you told us that this is exactly the effect our services have.

The information here is just a summary of the responses you gave. If you would like more information or a copy of the full report, please let us know by contacting Rebecca Barr on 0131 229 1456 or rebecca.barr@scottishwarblinded.org

Policy Update

Access to public transport has been an issue of concern which a number of members have raised with the charity in recent months. This resulted in the Policy Team holding a stall at The Gathering to find out the views of members on the provision of transport services for people with sight loss.

Generally, members were positive about their local transport services, with more saying they were “Good” rather than “OK” or “Poor.”

However, members in rural areas were more likely to feel public transport in their community was not good enough, and many
members had specific problems such as bus routes being withdrawn or bus drivers not calling out the stops.

One particular concern which members have raised is that there is inconsistency between local authority concessionary travel schemes for rail travel. Some local authorities provide a 50% discount for companions on the train for people with a concessionary travel card, others offer no discount for companions. We have contacted all local authorities to ask what their policy is on a discount for companions and discovered that while 14 do offer a concession for companions, 18 do not. Members have also highlighted a lack of knowledge among ScotRail staff of the +1 card and what it covers in different areas.

This feedback from members has been invaluable for the Policy Team who are now preparing a response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on its new Transport Strategy, so Scottish War Blinded can make the case for improvements being made and problems addressed. We will argue that all local authorities should offer a discount on rail tickets for companions of people with the National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons Travel Card.

Transport services for people with sight loss will also be an issue we will highlight as we develop the charity’s manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021. In our manifesto we will set out a number of policies which are important for people with sight loss which we will encourage candidates in the election to support. We are keen to hear the views of members on what other issues should be in our manifesto. If you have any ideas on other issues we should campaign on, please get in touch with the Policy Team:

Richard Baker - Policy Manager: 
richard.baker@royalblind.org
0131 229 1456

Callum MacDonald - Policy and Research Officer: 
callum.macdonald@royalblind.org
0131 229 1456

The Gathering 2019
This year Scottish War Blinded has held two successful Gatherings: the Northern Gathering in Inverness and our flagship event in Clydebank. Both were well attended and were
bigger than previous events. We even had a waiting list for places at the Gathering in Clydebank.

Feedback from members who attend is always good and we are delighted that the two events are such popular fixtures. There were a number of people who missed out on places this year as we had a first come first served arrangement. We will change this for next year to give everyone a fairer chance of getting a place. Details will be provided nearer the time.

Dates for next year’s events will be made available early in 2020.

**Members’ Council Update**

Scottish War Blinded continues to have three Members’ Councils who give us feedback on what we are doing, provide us with suggestions and generally keep us in touch with our members’ views.

For the first time we held a meeting of representatives from each Council at The Gathering in September. In all, there were ten members present, from both Centres and from our General Council. They found meeting together useful and discussed a wide variety of topics. If you want to know more about their meeting, please contact any of the Council members.

The noticeboards at both Centres give details of their Council members. The General Members’ Council is for anyone who does not go to a Centre. General Members’ Council members’ names and contact details are below:

Jo Long (Inverness)  
j.long3@btinternet.com

Rod Murchison (Inverness)  
themurchisons@googlemail.com

Alf Gibbons (Dundee)  
alf_gibbons@hotmail.com

**Annual Report**

Copies of Scottish War Blinded’s Annual Report were available to those who attended The Gathering in September and there are more copies at the Linburn and Hawkhead Centres.

The Annual Report is also available on our website for those who are able to read it online.

If you would like a copy sent to you or if you would like the report in another format, please contact Scottish War Blinded on 0131 229 1456.
We are still looking for members to join the General Members’ Council, and Rebecca would love to hear from you if you are interested. Please contact her by emailing rebecca.barr@scottishwarblinded.org for more information.

**Trip to the Somme**

This year’s annual Battlefield Trip saw 30 members, their guests and six members of staff embark on a six-day trip to France and Belgium for Scottish War Blinded’s annual battlefields trip.

The members travelled by luxury coach to Belgium, which allowed for plenty of time to form new friendships. As is always the case, the inter services banter didn't take long to flow.

On arrival in Belgium, the group headed to Ypres and stopped off at the Menin Gate. During the trip, the group visited a number of sites significant to World War One, including the Yorkshire Trench, the scene of the first and last shots fired.

The trip provided an opportunity for members to develop new friendships and learn more about each other’s lives, both during and after service.

If you attended this year’s trip and would like to share your experience with your fellow members, please upload pictures or stories to the 'Members and Friends of Scottish War Blinded' Facebook group.

Details on next year’s trip will be shared in a future edition of The Bugle.

**Rebrand Update**

Scottish War Blinded is working on how best to help many more veterans adapt to sight loss in the coming years. As the majority of our members are no longer blinded in war, a review of our name is on-going. This will have no impact on the support currently available to any member, so please do not feel concerned about the provision of support.

Recently we asked you, and all members, for your views on options for a new name for our charity, and for your suggestions and feedback. We sent a questionnaire to all...
members, visited Members’ Councils, and did one-to-one interviews with members.

Thank you to the 260 members who returned questionnaires, and to those who contributed to the research in other ways. A very broad range of views were expressed, with some preferring to keep our name as it is, and a similar number welcoming a change of name. In particular, we welcomed the large number of suggestions made for further options for a new name.

We are working on a report of the findings of the research. Because we have gathered so much feedback, it will take some time to get the full report of the research ready, and we will update you when we are able to share it with you.

Once again, we are extremely grateful to you for contributing your time, your honest feedback, and your suggestions. You will be kept up to date in The Bugle and on other forums as this project progresses.

- Davina Shiell, Associate Director of Marketing, Scottish War Blinded

The Bugle: Printed by Scotland’s Bravest

Scottish War Blinded has recently teamed up with Scotland’s Bravest Manufacturing Company (SBMC) for the printing and distribution of our quarterly all-member newsletter.

SBMC provides a range of high quality services, from road signs to magazines. The autumn edition of The Bugle is the third edition SBMC has printed for us, and I’m sure you’ll all agree that they are doing an excellent job.

SBMC is based in the Erskine Veterans Village Estate in Bishopton; a location which has been famous for supporting Armed Forces Veterans since World War One.

A division of Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) which helps veterans into employment, SBMC provides jobs and support to men and women who are adjusting to life outside the military. They are a not-for-profit organisation, so any surplus generated from commercial activity is redirected to support veterans, either in the factory or across the wider community.

Army veteran and Scottish War Blinded member, Drew Crockett, volunteers at SBMC once a week.
The 56-year-old has glaucoma and describes his sight as “tunnel vision with only 30% sight remaining.”

Drew worked as a postman at Royal Mail; a career he had for over 25 years, but his deteriorating sight meant he could no longer work.

Drew said: “I’ve enjoyed getting back into the working environment and it’s nice to be working with the guys.

“I volunteer on a Monday and do lots of different jobs. I’ve got to be careful what I do because of my sight. I can’t work any of the big machines.

“I thought life would become boring when I had to stop working. But I’ve become a member of Scottish War Blinded and volunteer at SBMC so I’ve been meeting lots of new people.”

And Drew, who has been a member of Scottish War Blinded for one year, has even helped with producing The Bugle. “I like to read The Bugle so it’s nice to see how it’s put together,” Drew said.

We are proud to be working collaboratively with SBMC to provide opportunities for veterans to help regain their independence.

**WW2 Veterans Appeal**

Are you a World War Two veteran who would like to share your experience of life during the War?

Next year marks the 75th anniversary of VE Day. To commemorate, we’re looking to share the stories of World War Two veterans, just like Jimmy and David’s, for fellow veterans and younger generations in our newsletters and in local and national newspapers.

If you would like to share your World War Two story, Eilidh or Jos, both of whom work in the Marketing Team at Scottish War Blinded and write stories about our members, would be honoured to pay you a visit to chat to you about your time in the forces.

If you are interested, please contact Eilidh on 0131 229 1456 (extension 2047) or email to eilidh.mccartney@scottishwarblinded.org.
Thank you for reading the latest edition of The Bugle. If you would like to give feedback or submit content for a future edition, please get in contact with Eilidh:

Get in touch:
Email: eilidh.mccartney@scottishwarblinded.org
Phone: 0131 229 1456 (extension 2047)

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