The Bugle
Spring 2019
Welcome to the latest edition of The Bugle, Scottish War Blinded’s quarterly membership newsletter. In the second edition of 2019, we feature member stories, top-tips on how to get active, as well as from the Rehabilitation Team, details of upcoming events, 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 using the details below. Alternatively, please contact your Outreach Worker.

Following positive feedback about the new layout of The Bugle, all future issues will be in columns.

We are working on improving the content and layout of The Bugle. In this edition, the stories fall under several themes.

If you would like to submit any feedback or have a question, please get in touch with Eilidh.

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Sign-up to Walk with Gordon

Members, Gordon needs you! Gordon’s 500 miles challenge is starting on Monday 6 May – register now if you would like to join him and your fellow members, in our first optional challenge to get active.

Members and their family and friends are being invited to walk 500 miles as a collective unit over a six-week period. This is an incredible 1,117,500 steps, which is the distance from Inverness in the Highlands to Castle Douglas in the Scottish Borders, and back again!

You are invited to challenge yourself and take part in Gordon’s walking challenge; no matter what your current fitness level is.

Why not try walking as much or as little as you can; a walk to the kitchen, your garden or around your local park all counts. We will provide a talking pedometer free-of-charge to allow you to track your steps, and your team coordinator will be on-hand throughout to help you to achieve your walking goals.

For more information and to sign-up, please contact Eilidh on 0131 229 1456 (extension 2047).

Para-Athlete with Sight-Loss Shares his Tips for Staying Active

Army veteran and member of Scottish War Blinded, Steven Waterson, is an avid marathon runner despite having very little sight. Steven has adapted to life with sight loss and has found that the use of a long cane has enabled him to keep active.

The 46-year old from Dalkeith underwent high risk cranial surgery in 2009 following his second brain haemorrhage. This resulted in paralysis of his left side, causing him to lose his left visual field completely. Prior to losing his sight in his left eye, Steven suffered a stroke in 2003 and was diagnosed with Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) – a congenital condition. The UK Number One Para Athlete has had to overcome several additional challenges to enable him to get to where he is today, including a brain haemorrhage, blood clots in his legs, viral meningitis and a pulmonary embolism in his lung.

Steven joined the Army Catering Corps in 1992 as a chef, working in the UK, Germany and Kosovo, which amalgamated with the Royal Logistics Corps in 1993. His condition meant that he was medically discharged from the army after almost 20 years’ service.
Just eight months after surgery in 2009, and a lot of determination later, Steven ran the Loch Ness marathon. With no vision in his left eye, Steven ran with a long roller cane to allow him to identify objects and fellow runners during the course of the run. He’s now completed many marathons, including an Ultra Marathon, all with the help of his long cane.

Steven, who is classified as a cerebral palsy runner (T38) due to the weakness in his left side, holds the UK Number One T38 Para Athlete titles for both marathon and half marathon distances, which he has held since 2013.

Steven has always enjoyed running, ever since he ran cross country at school as a boy. “I was always intrigued by marathons – every year I’d watch the London marathon, and I always knew one day I’d get to run a marathon,” he said. To keep his dream alive, Steven adapted to running with sight-loss and is running his sixth London marathon in at the end of this month.

“The cane identifies me as a visually impaired person when I’m running. As I don’t always see somebody, they might take measures themselves not to smash into me.

“It’s really useful when I’m crossing roads. Drivers are a bit more accepting if you’re crossing the road and you’ve got the white stick.

“I’ve got all the techniques in place to keep looking and scan across and up and down.”
Steven is an advanced personal trainer and sports therapist as well as regularly coaching and managing teams at the Edinburgh Athletics Club.

During his HND in Sports Coaching and Fitness, he completed his work experience placements at the Linburn Centre, working with the members in the gym. Steven said: “Being a member of Scottish War Blinded and having the use of the gym at the Linburn Centre has provided me with the outlet to go and do these things.”

Steven is now helping others optimise their sports performance, having recently set up his own sports massage therapy business in Dalkeith, called SW Sports Massage Therapy. He’d welcome seeing fellow members to provide sports massage to relieve aches and pains.

Steven said: “I may not exactly see what other people see, but I’ve got good senses in other ways. I’ve got Highers in Human Biology, I’ve done vocational training and I’ve spent enough time in physio myself. “It’s good to have something in your life that gives you that sense of purpose.”

Steven has some advice for fellow members to celebrate Gordon’s 500 challenge:

What advice would you give to members who want to keep fit? Steven encourages those with a vision impairment to keep active, saying: “Just because people are older or have a vision impairment, these are not necessarily reasons not to participate in sport.

“There are great benefits in terms of mental health and social skills.

“Members of Scottish War Blinded could join a walking group – there’s stimulation you can get from that mentally and it’s a great social outlet.

“You might also learn how to negotiate certain situations with a cane that you wouldn’t do if you were sitting at home.

“Don’t discount anything, keep an open mind and go give it a try. Try to see it how it is and give yourself the chance, because other things come from sport – not just holding records.”

Scottish War Blinded can help members to get active in lots of different ways; from providing some words of encouragement to referring you to an organisation which specialises in your chosen sport. Steven said: “When I wanted to get involved in Athletics I got in touch with Scottish Disability Sport.”
If you would like to discuss trying out a new active hobby, please speak to your Outreach Worker or a Centre Officer.

What do you think of Gordon’s 500 Mile challenge?

Steven is excited to be taking part in Gordon’s 500 miles challenge and is encouraging members to get active and get involved in the challenge.

Steven said: “You could walk in teams or individually. Members can walk on a treadmill or around the gardens at the centres, or even just pottering around the garden at home.

“Even gentle slow walking is good for your muscles to keep your muscle tone. It’s also good for your bones as it keeps them nice and firm, as well as being good for the heart and counteracting weight gain.”

Gordon’s walking challenge starts on Monday 6 May. If you would like to Walk with Gordon and contribute towards walking 500 miles, please call Eilidh on 0131 229 1456 (extension 2047).

Archers – Get your Bow at the Ready!

Scottish War Blinded archers are being invited to put their skills to the test in the very first membership wide archery competition!

The competition will take place at the Linburn Centre on Tuesday 30 July, with teams representing Outreach, the Hawkhead Centre and the Linburn Centre taking part.

Members can take part in one of two categories, Novice or Open, and will be competing for the team trophy.

If you do not attend a Centre and would like to compete, please contact Jim, Centre Manager at the Linburn Centre, on 0131 333 1369.

If you attend a Centre, please speak to a member of staff about taking part.

Accommodation will be provided locally for those who need to stay overnight before and after the competition.
Swimming with Sight-Loss

Swimming is a sport that most people have enjoyed at some point in their lives, but did you know that swimming can be an excellent sport for those who have a visual impairment?

Members of Scottish War Blinded have been able to experience swimming thanks to the support of Centre Officers or Outreach Workers. Hawkhead Centre Officer, Abbie, has helped several members to start swimming again, having been a swimming coach for over ten years. One such member is Malcolm Sillars who learned to swim at 93 years of age, having not been in a pool for over 70 years.

Malcolm has been a member of Scottish War Blinded since July 2017 and attends the Hawkhead Centre weekly. Malcolm said: “I want to try everything going at the Centre, especially if it involves moving around.”

“The Centre introduced swimming for the first time and I was asked if I wanted to go along, so I said yes. “I told them I couldn’t swim and hadn’t been in a pool for 70 years, but I got to go along anyway and give it a try.”

Abbie was delighted to help Malcolm experience swimming again after so long. Abbie said: “He was very keen to learn to swim. He’s an inspiration and shows that age is just a number.”

When Malcolm first got in the water, he was quite apprehensive and was feeling shaky. Malcolm knew that there were people watching him and this gave him confidence. He said: “After a few weeks of swimming, I felt comfortable in the water and I really enjoyed it.

“I had a float behind my neck and was able to swim on my back which was very relaxing.

“Not being able to see didn’t bother me because I knew to make my way around the outside of the pool.”

Abbie said: “Not long after Malcolm got used the water, he was able to float, kick his legs and plant his feet on the floor whenever he needed to. After a few sessions in the pool, his confidence soared and he started getting his legs kicking more and was managing some breaststroke.

“It was a very enjoyable experience and we had a good laugh too.”

If, like Malcolm, you would like to give swimming a try, find out more from Abbie as she answers questions on the benefits of swimming and provides advice and tips to help you build confidence when in the water:
Why is swimming a good sport for those who have a vision impairment and mobility issues?

Swimming is a great form of exercise for anyone. For those who have a visual impairment the pool can be a great place to exercise as you can choose an area of the pool and can stick with a depth you are comfortable with.

Swimming pools have useful features to help you keep your whereabouts, such as lane ropes. Most pools have a system where swimmers swim in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction; this means that you won’t have to look out for anyone swimming towards you. In addition, we recommend counting your arm strokes as this is great at indicating how far you have until you reach the wall of the pool.

We recommend letting the lifeguard know about your visual impairment so they can ensure you are safe whilst in the water. They can also support you to get in and out the pool.

For those with mobility issues, including those who use a wheelchair, the water is great as it really helps support your weight and help keep your balance. Anyone with mobility issues can be assisted to the poolside by lifeguards if needed.

If a member has not been swimming since losing their sight, what are the first steps to getting in the water?

The first steps would be to take someone with you who can guide, support, and help you to get an awareness of the surroundings. I also recommend that anyone with a vision impairment lets the lifeguards know as you enter the pool so they can provide any assistance required.

I suggest that members take it very easy, perhaps starting with walking up and down in the water at your own speed until you are more comfortable.

I would keep going regularly, the more you build up confidence the more relaxing, and enjoyable it will be.

When in the water, what do members need to keep in mind when swimming with sight-loss?

The first thing is to stay close to the shallower end where you can stand if you need to stop for any reason. If you are a confident swimmer, get to know the swimming direction rules before entering the swimming lane.

Remember to listen for any instruction or whistle calls from lifeguards, as this is how they can guide and reassure you if needed as well as ensure your safety.
You can ask for floatation devices such as noodles, or swim belts. As well as supporting you in the water, using a float shows other swimmers that you are building your confidence which in turn can give you more space.

**What are the health benefits of swimming?**

Swimming has always been known to be one of the best forms of exercise. It really is a full body workout no matter what stroke and pace you are doing. Even a simple walk up and down the shallow end is a great workout due to the resistance of the water.

Swimming covers many components of fitness, including cardiovascular to improve your heart and lung function, strength and endurance to improve muscle strength, balance and flexibility. The water supports all your joints and is not weight bearing so reduces pressure on knees, hips etc.

Not only is swimming great for physical health, being in the water provides a relaxing atmosphere where you can unwind, relieve any tension and relax the mind.

**What do you say to members who are thinking about trying swimming?**

Try it. You may surprise yourself about how quickly it comes to you again or how quickly you can pick it up if you’re starting to learn.

You will also leave feeling refreshed, energetic and with a sense of accomplishment. Swimming really is for anyone.

I would suggest you pick a quiet time to go to the pool; usually around mid-afternoon is a great time.
Member Adapts to Life with Sight Loss

Walker Moir became a member of Scottish War Blinded in December 2018 having recently lost his sight. He has found that equipment from Scottish War Blinded and being introduced to a new hobby has eased his transition to living with sight loss.

Walker, who is 62 years old and lives in Falkirk, has multiple eye conditions and started to lose his sight two years ago. In the last six months, his sight deteriorated further which has resulted in him recently feeling the full impact of living with sight loss.

Walker has cataracts and macular degeneration, as well as Ischaemia in his right eye – a condition resulting in blood not getting to the back of the eye. In October 2018, Walker’s sight deteriorated further when he suffered a bleed in his left eye, resulting in no central vision.

“I was still working up until October but when I had a bleed in my left eye, I could hardly see anything anymore so I suddenly had to give up my driving licence and stop working,” said Walker.

From 1977 to 1980, Walker worked as a Bridge Troop Field support squadron in the Army, and subsequently worked as a driver, transport manager and, most recently, in school maintenance.

After being registered severely sight impaired, Walker went along to his local sensory centre in Falkirk. Walker was referred to Scottish War Blinded by a fellow member. He said: “When I was waiting to be seen at the sensory centre, a man came over to chat to me and he asked what organisations I was with.

“I explained that I had just been registered, so he asked if I had been in the forces and suggested that I become a member of Scottish War Blinded.”

Walker receives support from Outreach Worker, John Kerr, and has benefitted from input from Rehabilitation Officer, Sharon McAllister, as well as attending local lunch groups.

John visited Walker in his home and identified equipment to make carrying out day-to-day tasks easier. “The equipment has made such a difference, in particular the Ruby magnifier; I take it everywhere with me,” Walker said.
Walker, who lives with his wife and daughter, said: “I went to Asda by myself for the first time last week and I managed to get myself along no problem, but as soon as I got in it was too bright – it was brutal.

“I couldn’t see individual items, just blocks of colour. I thought I was getting apples but when I picked it up I could feel that it was an onion.

“I’ve been going shopping all my life and now I can’t even tell the difference between an onion and an apple. It’s very strange.”

Walker took his Ruby magnifier with him which meant he was able to identify individual items as well as see prices. “I had to juggle the basket, my cane and the magnifier; I only went for five things and it took an hour!

“I got it done though so I was chuffed. I was really nervous beforehand, it was like going into the unknown but I managed and the staff were really helpful. I’ve got no worries about going shopping by myself again.

The Ruby has given me more confidence about doing things like going to the shops. I would have had to get help straight away if I hadn’t used the magnifier. It’s a tremendous wee bit of kit.”

As well as the Ruby magnifier, Walker has also received a CCTV reader, spotlight lamp, talking clock and watch, and kitchen equipment.
Walker has always loved cooking but was struggling to cook independently after losing his sight. John provided Walker with a level indicator for pouring liquids like hot tea, and talking scales. Walker said: “Simple things like the talking scales make such a difference – I wish I had had them before I couldn’t see! It’s so simple but it makes such a big difference.”

Thanks to the CCTV reader, Walker is able to read his own mail without relying on his family, as well as complete forms and view family photographs. “It’s not just one big thing, it’s all the little things added together that make a difference,” Walker said.

As well finding comfort in new equipment, Walker also discovered a new hobby when he was introduced to the Forth Valley Blind Bowling Association by a fellow Scottish War Blinded member. “I fair enjoyed myself and was told that I played well. “Not bad for someone who can’t see where the bowls are!” Walker laughed.

Prior to losing his sight, Walker enjoyed driving and initially struggled with the thought of no longer being able to enjoy his hobby, saying: “When the bowling came along I thought it was great. I think that is why I don’t miss driving because I was able to get stuck into a new hobby.

“I never in a million years thought of playing bowls but it’s really helped me to cope with losing my sight.” Walker has been playing bowls since November 2018 and plays three times per week. Walker said: “My daughter is disabled and struggles with motor skills but she has started coming along to the Sunday bowls with me and is doing great.

“It’s great I have been able to introduce her to a new hobby as well.” Walker played in the Scottish Association of Blind Bowlers competition in Glasgow at the beginning of March and won a silver medal. He said: “I would love to do more competitions. It’s my ambition to one day play for Scotland.

“I’ve always liked to set myself targets. I went from being an office boy to the transport manager of a large oil organisation.” Walker continued: “I wouldn’t say I was depressed but I can understand how people would get depressed. Getting into bowls and becoming a member of Scottish War Blinded has really helped me to cope.

Walker is hoping to attend the Linburn Centre in West Lothian and is looking forward to the prospect of trying new activities, saying: “The support I have received is second to none. It’s early days for me so I’m still getting my head around what I want to do, and what could be good for me.”
Veteran Takes to the Slopes in Competitive Snowboarding

A Scottish War Blinded veteran from Dalkeith, who had both his eyes removed after he was injured during operations in Iraq, is training to hit the world stage in competitive snowboarding.

Ben Shaw, aged 36, has been totally blind since he was injured by a roadside bomb on his second tour of Iraq with his battalion, 3 Rifles, on February 25, 2007.

For 10 years following his life-changing injury, Ben, who has been a talented snowboarder since he was boy, gave up his favourite sport – initially thinking he couldn’t board without sight.

Ben has been supported by Scottish War Blinded since 2007, and has taken part in activities at the Linburn Centre, while receiving cane route training and independent living skills training with the rehabilitation team, as well as support from his Outreach Worker, Dawn Smith.

Growing in confidence by applying a military mind-set to overcome the challenges of living with no sight, Ben even took part in a Ferrari driving experience at Knockhill race track through Scottish War Blinded in 2008.

As the urge to get back on the snow prevailed, Ben joined the Armed Forces Para-Snow Team (AFPST) last year, and has demonstrated incredible ability back on the board, progressing rapidly in training.

And he’s just embarked on an exciting season of competition in his beloved sport, with his ultimate goal to reach the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing.

Ben said: “I started snowboarding when I was around 10, but I was skiing from when I was three.

“With my dad being in the forces, one of his jobs was in Germany, and it was right next to the Zugspitze. When my mum and me used to go over we used to go skiing.

“I took to it really quickly. I’ll always remember, when my dad was teaching me to ski, I’d see people on skis and just think it was easy.

“As I got older, snowboarding just looked so much better. I took to it, big style.

“When I joined the army in 2002, whenever time allowed I would go over there. I’d been set to go on one of the selection courses for the army’s winter snow sports team once I got back from Iraq, but then I was injured.”
Ben first tried to get back on the slopes over in Morzine just months after losing his sight. However, it was a step too soon in his recovery, as, he explains, his brain had not yet adapted to coping without eyesight.

“My brain hadn’t settled down and got used to the fact it no longer had vision. When you lose your sight so suddenly, things go completely off keel.

“Your balance, coordination, orientation, special awareness – you don’t have a grasp on those. That’s only something that comes with time and practice.

“I was quite factual about it. I just thought it was an unfortunate casualty of being injured in the forces. Snowboarding was one of those things I’d have to box up and think it was good while it lasted.

“I thought, I’m not going to be able to do what I used to do, like go over jumps. If I can’t do that then I don’t want to do it at all. I resigned to the fact I wasn’t doing it anymore.

Image shows Ben on a ski-lift wearing his helmet with attached mic, and goggles.
“As time went by, the want to get back on the snow increased, and I wasn’t worried about not being able to do jumps.”

Ben got in touch with the AFPST – a charity which supports the recovery of our wounded, injured and sick military personnel and veterans. After initial training in England and selection training in Austria in October 2018, Ben joined AFPST’s performance team.

Training one-on-one with his coach, Ben has adapted to utilise sound as his guide down the slopes – even beating snowboarders with sight in his event, timed slalom.

Ben said: “I was learning to do it all a different way, so I had to slow it all down. When you lose your sight, trust is a big thing. I find the military bond helps with that.

“When Jim, my coach, boards ahead of me I can hear his board on the ice and immediately have a point for my direction. We have an earpiece speaker system, but I was finding it was holding me back because it was muffling my peripheral sound.

“So when we were in Austria Jim bought one of those Alpine cow bells – we were in a really small village and that was the only thing he could find. I followed the sound of that and things just ridiculously accelerated from there.

“As you’re boarding there are mental barriers you hit and you feel really uncomfortable. There are moments when I’m following the bell, then a moment of sanity where I think, ‘I’m attached to a snow board on a mountain on top of a glacier, following the sound of a cow bell and travelling at 30 mph?!’ You just have to keep going.

“I’ve progressed ridiculously quickly, I’m really happy with it. Snowboarding again has surpassed my expectations.”

And with his long-term goal to reach the 2022 Winter Paralympics, Ben says his family, including wife, four-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, are very proud of what he’s achieving.

Ben said: “My kids love that I snowboard. It’s really good because with disabled people as a whole there’s an emphasis on regaining independence, but also I think particularly with sight loss, if it’s quite sudden and dramatic, you’re basically regaining your life.

“I think even more so when you’re in the forces – you go from being extremely independent to being dependent and it’s ultra-difficult.

“You go through the recovery, but I don’t class snowboarding as that, I class it as regaining life. It’s a big one for me. My wife always says I could snowboard better than I could walk!”
World War Two Veteran who breeched the Rhine in 1945 Remembers Milestone Crossing

A World War Two veteran who was part of the operation that saw Allied troops cross the Rhine in 1945 – breeching the last natural barrier into Nazi Germany – remembered the landmark event in March.

Crammed onto a buffalo tracked vehicle, Scottish War Blinded member Bill Robertson, then aged 19, was one of the British soldiers who first crossed the River Rhine south of Rees (Germany) as part of Operation Plunder on the night of March 23, 1945.

The young Private, from Perth, was with the 5th/7th Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders when he faced the “dark, fast-flowing” river at 21.00 hours alongside soldiers of the 51st Highland Division.

Image on the left shows Bill now and on the right is of Bill as a teenager during the War

Under enemy fire, Bill was one of the troops to make it across the waters onto German soil – an event which signified the beginning of the downfall for Hitler’s forces from within Germany.
“We’d started moving at 17.00 hours. I think it was military police putting white tapes down so we just followed them to the banks of the Rhine,” said Bill, now aged 93.

“We thought the war was moving towards the end. We clambered into these buffalos operated by the Northamptonshire Yeomanry.

“I think we were all apprehensive, especially as we had all been issued with inflatable rubber tubes. We wondered what they were for, but they were for in case you went over the side. You were meant to throw them away when you got to the other side.

“They had a thing called ‘Monty’s Moonlight’ which were searchlights that went up into the air and bounced off the clouds to try and give some light. There was a lot of smoke.

“The nearest town was a place called Rees. The fighting there was much harder and it was ablaze when we crossed. We could see what was happening, but we were really concentrated on where we were going, which was hopefully to the other side.

“I thought I was in the leading buffalo, but in actual fact of course there were hundreds at the same time.

“Then the track of the buffalo I was in locked solid and didn’t move. As a result, we went round in a circle in the middle of the Rhine, which was not a happy situation. The flow of the water was carrying us towards Rees.

“We were all thinking, ‘What do we do now? Do we jump overboard?’

“There were spouts of water where the shells were dropping, and there was small arms fire and mortars on the other side.

“Suddenly both tracks roared into action and the next thing we knew was that we hit the cobbled bank of the German side.”

The Gordon Highlanders infantryman had already been stationed in France, Belgium and Holland since he had been conscripted into the army on April 6, 1944, aged 18, before he came to be involved in the milestone operation.

Bill continued: “I don’t think any of us were into the idea of achievement. We were very glad we were still alive.

“We advanced towards the Nether Rhine, that’s a tributary of the Rhine, towards a farm house. We were shelled there. There were a few casualties. One is too many.

“Then we were ordered to dig in trenches to hold the position and when dawn came we found we were somewhat exposed and subject to sniper fire.

“After that, we crossed the bridge at the Nether Rhine and the whole thing went quiet. We didn’t know whether something was going to happen, a counter attack. It was very eerie.
whether something was going to happen, a counter attack. It was very eerie.

“One of the terrible things that happened was that we heard that Major-General Thomas Gordon Rennie CB, DSO, MBE was killed two days after the crossing. He was a highly respected man.

“It was like a dark cloud came down on top of us as the news filtered through. I think some of us thought, ‘Well, if a General can get killed…’ They don’t usually kill Generals.”

As Bill moved up through Northern Germany with his battalion, he recalls the moment they passed the gates of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which had just been liberated.

“We went past it quickly,” he said. “I could smell it. It was terrible.”

Arriving at Bremerhaven on May 6, which was occupied by German marines, Bill says an “uneasy peace” had been declared.

He explained: “There were five or six marines to one of us, so we had to tread very carefully. The tension was palpable.

“Gradually arms were handed in and we took over. You realised that nobody was going to shoot you anymore, thinking, ‘I don’t have to have a pack on my back. I don’t have to watch out for people shooting me.

“We handed over eventually to the Americans, who used Bremerhaven as a port of entry for their goods.”

Bill then moved to working in ‘intelligence’ in Germany before he was demobbed in 1947.

He joined the Dunlop Group and progressed to be Director of the Dunlop Rhodesian Group, living in Rhodesia for 25 years. On his return to Scotland, he has lived in North Berwick, Scotland, for 32 years.

Now, as a father-of-two, grandfather-of-four and great-grandfather-of-three, he says he wishes for the events of March 23, 1945, not to be forgotten, though he does not blame younger generations for a ‘lack of awareness’ about the assault on the Rhine.

“It’s partly a generational thing. I accept that,” said Bill.

“There are certain things that happened during the war, the invasion of France, the Ardennes, the crossing of the Rhine - these were major things. I feel very personal about the crossing of the Rhine because it was a big thing. March 23 sticks with me.

“It breeched the last natural barrier leading to the German Reich. It seemed to mean something. We knew it was a turning point.

“I think back on some of the young men, that’s all they had. I’m on bonus time, very much so.”
Upcoming Trips and Activities

Battlefield Trip 2019

This year, Scottish War Blinded members will be embarking on another World War One battlefields tour. The 2019 trip will see members visit France and Belgium over six days and will include staying in Ypres, and travelling to sites in Mons and Arras, as well as a visit to The Battle of the Somme in northern France.

The trip features an action-packed itinerary, with members getting the opportunity to attend the evening remembrance ceremony at the Menin Gate.

Dates of the trip are from Monday 26 to Sunday 31 August 2019, with members travelling by luxury coach and ferry. The cost of the trip is £650 per person and members are welcome to bring along a guest to accompany them. This includes your travel, accommodation, entry into all of the sites, as well as all meals throughout the six-day trip.

To register your interest, or to request full itinerary details, please contact Jim, Centre Manager at Linburn, on 0131 333 1369.

Places are given on a first come first served basis. Once you have registered your interest, you will be sent a form to complete and will be asked to pay a deposit of £100.

Experience Barracks Life Once Again

Following the very successful trip to Redford Barracks in November last year, members of Scottish War Blinded have been invited back for another military experience weekend in June.

Last year’s trip gave nine members the chance to relive their younger years and experience modern day life in the barracks. The activities included survival skills, a simulation shooting range, badminton, archery and other fitness exercises.

On Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 June, members will enjoy a series of activities all in a military environment at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh.

The weekend is organised as a joint venture with the Hawkhead Centre and the Army Training Unit in Scotland, all in the expectation of giving our members a weekend to remember. Members are required to self-travel to either the Hawkhead Centre or Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, with members staying overnight within the Barracks.

This is an active weekend so a good level of mobility is required. For more information and to register your interest, please contact Jodie Burnett on 0141 370 8050 or Jodie.burnett@scottishwarblinded.org.
Cenotaph Trip 2019
Last year, 12 members represented Scottish War Blinded at the London Cenotaph where they acknowledged the contribution of military and civilian servicemen and women involved in the two World Wars and later conflicts. This was an excellent trip which was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended.

We are excited to be applying for tickets in the hope that we will be able to take even more members to the London Cenotaph again in November 2019. We will find out whether we have been allocated tickets, and if so, how many, in July.

If you would like to spend a weekend in London to march on Remembrance Sunday and visit the Cenotaph war memorial, please register your interest by contacting Gillian McDonald, Deputy Centre Manager at Hawkhead, on 0141 370 8050.

The trip will be subsidised by Scottish War Blinded but members will be asked to provide a financial contribution. Please note that the trip involves a good amount of walking so members will be required to have good mobility in order to attend.

Armed Forces Day at the Hawkhead Centre
On Saturday 29 June, the Hawkhead Centre in Paisley is celebrating Armed Forces Day with members, your friends and family, and the local Armed Forces and Veterans community.

We encourage as many members as possible to come along from 12pm – 3pm for activities, socialising, a BBQ and more.

If you do not regularly attend the Centre and would like to attend the event, please call the Hawkhead Centre on 0141 370 8050.

Reunions, Gatherings and Lunch Groups
Over the summer months, we will be hosting reunion lunches throughout the country as well as the annual Gathering and Northern Gathering events.

Members will receive a personal invite to their nearest event closer to the time; please register your interest when you receive your invite as places fill up fast.

Lunch groups are held throughout the country and are a great way to socialise with fellow members whilst enjoying a tasty lunch.

If you don’t attend a lunch group and are interested in doing so, please contact your local Outreach Worker.
Rehab ‘Top-Tip’ - Crossing the Road Safely

When it comes to crossing the road with a visual impairment, we understand that this can often be a daunting task. Did you know that many pedestrian crossings have useful hidden features to allow those with a sight impairment to cross safely and independently? Most of us are aware that some pedestrian crossings beep when it is safe to cross, however, not all crossings make a sound and, for those who also have a hearing impairment, this is an unreliable way of crossing the road safely.

There is another very useful device on the majority of pedestrian crossings to allow visually and hearing impaired people to cross the road. This is a small plastic or metal cone, which is located on the underside of pedestrian crossings. When the green man shows that it is safe to cross, the cone starts spinning; this has tactile ridges on it to allow you to easily feel the spinning motion.

Katrina Campbell, Rehabilitation Officer at the Hawkhead Centre, recently showed member, Christina Johnson, how to cross the road safely by using the cone.

Christina asked for help when she found herself unable to cross the road independently. She said: “I was standing at the crossing for a long time waiting for it to beep so I could cross. A women came up to me and asked if I was waiting to cross. She told me that the green man had been and gone. I didn’t know the beeping had stopped working.”

Christina had never heard of the cones before and had always relied on listening out for the beep. Katrina accompanied Christina to the pedestrian crossing to show her how to use the tactile cones to allow her to cross safely and independently. “I was shown where to find the cone on the crossing and was told to keep my hand over it and wait until it started spinning,” said Christina.

“People ask me sometimes what I’m doing when I’m waiting to cross the road, so I tell them how to use the cone as well. It’s nice to know that I can help other people.”

When crossing the road, Christina’s best piece of advice is to wait patiently and not follow anyone else, saying: “I was crossing the road and a man stepped off the pavement, so I assumed it was safe for me to do so as well.”
“The man realised I was following him and pulled me back on to the pavement as he was going to sprint across the road to avoid the traffic.

“I learned to never rely on anyone else and always wait until I am fine to cross by myself.”

Katrina explains the benefits of the cones and how to use these safely:

**How important are these cones for members when they are out and about walking?**

Many of our members experience age related sight loss and as such often have a deterioration in their hearing also. In order to assist those with dual sensory loss to cross the road safely, tactile cones have been introduced to the underside of the signal box at controlled crossings. These tactile cones will rotate only when the green man is on thus lets those pedestrians with a visual and hearing impairment know that the traffic has been signalled to stop.

Since 2002, it has been a requirement for all “new” controlled crossings to have the tactile cone regardless of whether or not they have an audible signal to improve accessibility for all.

**When a member approaches a pedestrian crossing, what should they do?**

When approaching a controlled pedestrian crossing be aware that most crossing points should have dropped kerbs to assist those with mobility difficulties, people with prams, etc., so care should be taken to ensure that the dropped kerb is identified in time.

The area around many crossing points now has red/beige tactile paving (knobbly raised surface that can generally be felt under feet) designed help those with visual loss find the crossing point and kerb. Ideally position yourself half a step back from the kerb and within easy reach of the signal box before pressing the button on the signal box and utilising the tactile cone underneath (if it is available).

Once the audible sound commences and/or the tactile cone starts spinning that is the signal to start to cross the road at a steady pace. Some people worry that the tactile cone may be broken however, if it is broken, it just will not spin.
What do you say to members who are just starting to make use of the cone feature?
The next time you are at a controlled crossing take the time to look or feel under the signal box to see if it has been updated with a tactile cone. Activate the crossing by pressing the button in the usual way and hold onto the cone so you can experience what it feels like when it is activated, how long it stays on for, etc.

What is your top piece of advice when members are needing to cross a road?
Just take your time, if in any doubt wait. If you do start crossing the road and realise you have made an error of judgement, unless danger is imminent, continue on your course across the road rather than going back as drivers are less likely to anticipate someone retracing their steps.

If the cone is already spinning when you first touch it, wait until it stops and press the push button to activate the crossing again as you might have approached it just before the lights are about to change. It is better to wait than risk being on the road when the traffic gets the green light again.

Trust your judgement, if the tactile cone starts spinning but you can hear a car accelerating or tyres screeching in the vicinity just wait until you feel it is safe.

What should a member do if a pedestrian crossing does not have any additional aids?
Again, it is important to take your time, if you are unable to identify the green man and there is no audio signal or tactile cone then we recommend you wait until you hear no traffic sounds before attempting to cross the road.

Do not be afraid to ask for assistance people, in general, are keen to help. We advise our members to carry a symbol cane, even if it is kept in a jacket pocket or bag most of the time, it can be pulled out and held when waiting to cross a road as it notify others to the user’s visual issues. This means other pedestrians are more likely to offer assistance, without being asked, as well as making drivers aware there is a chance the user may not see them approaching and warning them to take more care.

If you are struggling to cross roads and would like extra assistance, please speak to your Outreach Worker or Centre Officer.
Scottish Power – Additional support available

Members of Scottish War Blinded are eligible to receive additional support services from Scottish Power to help you to manage your energy account. Scottish Power offers a free service called Priority Services Register (PSR). Customers with a visual impairment can receive additional support and services such as:

- Large print letters
- Bills in audio format
- Free annual gas safety check
- Priority support in the event of a power cut
- Assistance with providing meter readings
- Extra safety measures, such as additional identification measures in the event of a representative visiting you at your home

You can register to the Priority Services Measure (PSR) by:

- Emailing Contactus@scottishpower.com or ask a friend, family member or your Outreach Worker to email on your behalf
- If you would prefer to speak to someone over the phone, you can email to request a call back at a time that suits you – you will be asked security questions in order to discuss your account, so please ensure you know these or have someone with you who can help
- Alternatively, you can call 0800 027 0072 – you will be required to enter your account number using the keypad and may be on hold for some time

We have found it can be a little challenging and time consuming to register on the Priority Services Register, but once registered you don’t have to do so again and the benefits are great.
Poetry by Dave Phillips

Dave Phillips, a former Aerospace Systems Operator who was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) at 25 years old, is using his talent for poetry to explore his feelings about living with sight loss.

Now, aged 53, the married dad-of-two lives with minimal sight after the disease slowly stole away his peripheral vision.

Dave hopes that, by sharing his poems on social media, others living with sight loss can also find some solace in the range of emotion of his work, which encompasses everything from deep sadness to witty humour.

Dave said: “I think the first poem I wrote about my sight loss was ‘The Dark at The End of the Tunnel’ and I wrote it in around 1995, a few years after my diagnosis. I think it decided to be written rather than vice versa.

“It helps to get it on paper and share it with others. Certain things are hard to explain verbally. One of my poems, ‘Black Hole’, conveys the fact that seeing stars even on the clearest night is rendered impossible by the condition. The written word hopefully helps the reader understand that emotion.”

After years of collating a body of work on his sight loss, Dave has now compiled the poems into a collection: ‘The Eyes Have It’, with the hope it will be an insight into his sight loss for others. “The poems aim to give readers an insight into the mixed emotions felt by the visually impaired,” said Dave.

He shares his work, including poems on other themes, on his Facebook page, Plainverse, the Poetry of Dave Phillips. You can search for his page in the search bar when logged into Facebook.

“I hope readers see that it’s okay to laugh and it’s okay to cry, and that they’re not alone on their journey,” Dave said.

The Dark at the End of the Tunnel, by Dave Phillips

I’m not inside
The Tunnel yet
But I watch it being built
Before my very eyes

I know not,
When it’s due for completion
But I hope it’s not too soon
Forewarned of a surprise
It’s dark
At the end of the tunnel,
No guiding list have I

I am not afraid

I’ll travel far
Before I reach
The tunnel’s gaping mouth

Have everything surveyed

My mind’s eye
Shall have a library
Of pictures tucked away

Thus, sightless, I shall see

I don’t suppose
There’s any chance
I could

Take a torch with me

Short Story by Henry Shanks

Scottish War Blinded member, Henry Shanks, of Lanark, has submitted a short story which he would like to share with fellow members.

Henry tells the story of a visually impaired women who gave evidence in a Court room following an attack. Henry expresses her emotions during the experience and the challenges she was forced to overcome.

Nothing But, by Henry Shanks

Miss Janet Laird had thought that when she retired from teaching her life would be free of stress. But here she was lying awake at night, dreading the next day.

Not that this situation had been of her making. It was all because of that young thug. She would never forget that morning in the supermarket car park, in broad daylight too. Then there had been all those police procedures. Even the video identity parade The “VIPER” system. What a strange name! But at least she could manage to pick out that young hooligan from the parade of faces on the screen.

But how will I get on tomorrow in Court?

How did that Oath go again?

“I swear by almighty God that I shall tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”

“Can I really say that in front of the Judge and all those wigs?”

Fortunately her memory was still intact, she could still hear his harsh voice and she could remember the flash of the knife in the sunshine and it ripping through the straps of her hand bag.
She had seen his hood fall off as he pressed against her and she smelled the stale sweat and tobacco from his ginger hair. She had the smell of stale tobacco smoke and sweat in her nostrils.

She had collapsed upon the hard tarmac.

She remembered nothing else.

Janet watched the other Crown witnesses as they took their seats in the little overheated witness room. She soon was perspiring not just because of the temperature but mainly due to her apprehension.

One by one the witness’s names were called and eventually she was alone. Janet became even more worried. Had she not heard her name being called? Finally a Court Officer appeared holding a clipboard and announced “Janet Campbell Laird?”

Suddenly she was in the Courtroom in front of rows of eyes. She took to the witness stand, raised her right hand before being prompted to remove her glove and to repeat the Oath.

To a nice young lawyer in a pristine wig she confirmed her name, address, date of birth and that she was indeed a retired Head Teacher. Then he very kindly led her through what happened.

Then he asked her, “Can you see your assailant in this courtroom?”

She knew that he should be in the dock between two burly police officers. She looked around and saw a flash of ginger hair and pointing towards the figure nervously whispered: “Yes, there”. The judge intervened. “Miss Laird you will have to speak up, the jurors have to hear you”.

She cleared her throat and repeated: “Yes, there” “Thank you Miss Laird”, said the young man and sat down with a satisfied look towards the jury.

Now a burly red-featured lawyer approached her. He wore a dirty grey wig and his gown was hanging off one shoulder.

“Miss Laird. Am I correct in saying that you are registered blind?” he barked at her. She almost stepped out of the witness stand with fright but managed to counter: “Well, I am visually impaired.”

At this point the Judge became very agitated and his gold spectacles slid down his nose. He addressed the young lawyer sternly: “What! Why was this never brought out in evidence by the prosecution?”
The nice young prosecution lawyer flinched and clambered to his feet stuttering “I apologise to your Lordship for this oversight.” The elderly lawyer smirked at the jury and announced: “No more questions”.

The Judge turned to Miss Laird and gently remarked: “This is not your fault Miss Laird and your visual impairment must have made your experience even more.”

Both lawyers went on to address the Jury summing up the evidence.

The Judge directed the Jury to consider Miss Laird’s credibility, her clear identification of the accused from the Police video Parade based upon her recent and distressingly close contact with him. He had unusually vivid ginger hair.

As the Jury retired, the Court room was cleared and Janet sat in the cafeteria sipping at weak coffee and nervously playing with her kid gloves.

After two hours the Jury returned and their spokesperson informed the Clerk of Court that they had unanimously found the accused guilty of serious assault and attempted assault with a knife.

After scrutinizing some papers on his bench drew attention to the serious criminal record of the accused and accordingly sentenced him to three years imprisonment.

Janet Laird, sitting in the public benches, silently wept.

Scottish War Blinded Updates

Your New Holiday Cottage

Our holiday cottage in Paisley has officially been named. Rebecca Barr, Director of Scottish War Blinded, had the tough job of choosing just one of the excellent suggestions from members of the Hawkhead Centre.

Rebecca said: “We’re delighted to let you know that the cottage will be called Curlew Cottage, continuing the bird theme as it is next to the Hawkhead Centre. Many thanks to our members at the Centre for all their suggestions.”

Work has started on the cottage and as soon as an opening date is confirmed, we will let members know via the newsletters, as well as on the website and on Facebook.

We look forward to welcoming members and their friends and family to Curlew Cottage shortly!
Members’ Councils Update
At Scottish War Blinded, we try hard to make sure our services are designed and run in a way that all our members find helpful. To ensure we get it as right as possible, we rely on our members councils to guide us, make suggestions and tell us when we could do things better. There are members councils at both Centres, and details of the general members council are below. Please feel free to contact any of them if you have any feedback.

Jo Long (Inverness):
j.long3@btinternet.com
Rod Murchison (Inverness):
themurchisons@googlemail.com
Alf Gibbons (Dundee):
alf_gibbons@hotmail.com
Bill Stiven (Kirkcaldy):
billstiven1@gmail.com
Harvey Grainger (Aberdeen):
harveygrainger@btinternet.com
Ally Reid (Aberdeenshire):
allyureid@hotmail.com

We are also happy to hear from anyone who is interested in joining the General Members’ Council. If you are interested in joining, please contact Rebecca Barr at rebecca.barr@scottishwarblinded.org for more information.

Online Member Communications
We’re pleased to let you know that we will start to send regular email updates to those who have provided an email address. If you have yet to provide your email address and would like to do so, please email ei-lidh.mccartney@scottishwarblinded.org to be added to the mailing list.

If you do not have an email address, you are welcome to provide a friend or family member’s email address so they can pass information to you, as long as they are happy for you to do so.

There are even more ways for members to keep up to date as we have also set up a brand new Facebook group for members and their friends and family. This is a closed group, meaning only those who are accepted to join will be able to see any content. The Facebook group is a great way for members to see videos and pictures of fellow members, stories, top-tips and details of upcoming events. You will also be able to post and interact with others in the group.

Please log-in to your Facebook account and search for ‘Members and Friends of Scottish War Blinded’ to join.
Thank you for reading the latest edition of The Bugle. If you would like to submit content for the next edition in July, please get in contact with Eilidh:

Email: eilidh.mccartney@scottishwarblinded.org
Phone: 0131 243 1456 (extension 2047)

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