

**BRITISH MEMBERS COUNCIL**  
**THE WORLD VETERANS' FEDERATION**

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Honorary President:	Brigadier Ian Townsend CBE CCMI
Chairman:	Mr T.W. Whittles
Secretary/Treasurer:	Lieutenant Colonel Joe F. J. Falzon OSJ BEM

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**Member Organisations**

The Royal British Legion  
The War Widows Association of Great Britain  
Blesma The Limbless Veterans  
Combat Stress  
Blind Veterans UK  
The Royal British Legion Scotland (Legion Scotland)  
The Royal Air Forces Association

**Committees**

The Medical Advisory Committee

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**28<sup>th</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD VETERANS FEDERATION**  
**(Sopot) POLAND – 31<sup>st</sup> August – 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

**REPORT BY THE BRITISH MEMBERS COUNCIL**

The British Members Council (BMC) values its membership of the World Veterans Federation (WVF) and we remain a strong supporter of its aims and ideals. This was reiterated by Mr Terry Whittles on assuming his appointment as the new Chairman of the BMC in May 2015.

Since the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the WVF in Jordan in November 2012, the BMC, through its senior committee members, member organisations and sub-committee, continued to provide support to WVF activities. A review has been completed, instigated by the former Chairman of the BMC, to better position the international dimension of the BMC and its' Sub-Committee the Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) within the mix of the United Kingdom veteran organisations, charities and support groups.

A revised Constitution of the BMC was developed and subsequently adopted by the BMC Member Organisations in November 2013.

Combat Stress re-joined the BMC as a full voting member in May 2015, after an absence of 11 years.

The MAC has continued to provide policy recommendations and guidance on historic, existing and emerging physical and mental health issues affecting the Armed Forces community. The MAC has been a key consultative body and has helped to identify and make recommendations for new research on health issues affecting the Armed Forces Community.

The Resolutions adopted by the 27<sup>th</sup> WVF General Assembly held in Jordan in November 2012, as well as those adopted by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of SCEA held in Montenegro in 2014, were submitted to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, the Rt Hon Andrew Robathan and the Rt Hon Anna Soubry respectively. A very polite note of acknowledgement was received in both cases.

## **Meetings/Seminars attended Overseas**

The following meetings/seminars were attended overseas by BMC representatives since the 27<sup>th</sup> WVF General Assembly in Jordan in November 2012:

- The WVF Peace and International Security Summit – (Stockholm) – May 2013
- The Meeting of the SCEA Working Group of West Europe Countries – (Stockholm) – May 2013
- The Meeting of the SCEA Working Group of West Europe Countries – (Doorn) – November 2013
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee on European Affairs – (Montenegro) – June 2014
- The Meeting of the SCEA Working Group of West European Countries – (Montenegro) – June 2014

## **Visits by Members of the WVF Executive Board**

Mr Dan-Viggo Bergtun had an informal meeting with the Chairman of the BMC in July 2014.

## **Personalities**

The following appointments were announced since the 27<sup>th</sup> WVF General Assembly:

Mr Terry Whittles was elected as Chairman of the BMC in May 2015.

Brigadier Robin Cordell was appointed Chairman of the MAC in June 2015.

Brigadier Barry Le Grys MBE took over as Chief Executive of BLESMA (The Limbless Veterans).

Mr Kevin Gray MM MCGI took over as Chief Executive Officer of Legion Scotland.

Mr Nick Bunting took over as Secretary General of the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA).

Mrs Irene Wills took over as Chairman of the War Widows Association of Great Britain (WWA of GB)

Maj Gen Nick Caplin CB took over as Chief Executive of Blind Veterans (UK)

## **Last Post**

The BMC would like to remember with profound sadness the deaths of Mr Robert Leader DL, Chairman of the BMC, passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014 and of Datuk Abdul Hamid Ibrahim who died on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Both were inspirational leaders who are sorely missed by all who had the privilege to know them.

## **Summary of Current Initiatives**

The BMC, through its member organisations and sub-committee, has contributed and collaborated purposefully in pursuit of a number of initiatives and programmes advanced by the United Kingdom Government for the good and benefit of the ex-service community. A summary of these initiatives is attached.

The BMC wishes the 28<sup>th</sup> WVF General Assembly much success and takes this opportunity to thank the WVF Acting President, the Executive Director and Secretariat staff in Head Office for all the assistance they have given to the BMC over these past three years.

## **SUMMARY OF RECENT INITIATIVES**

### **The Royal British Legion**

The Royal British Legion is the largest military charity in the United Kingdom. It exists to assist serving personnel, veterans and their families and does so through a network of professional staff and volunteers working together. It also acts as a signposting organisation for those needing specialist help from other charities and organisations, for example Blind Veterans UK, Combat Stress or Blesma The Limbless Veterans.

Over the past few years the Legion has completely changed the way it delivers help to the service community and recent statistics show that more veterans are being assisted than ever before and, because of our new ways of working, it is actually costing less.

Apart from providing many aspects of wellbeing assistance to veterans, the Legion is also an effective campaigner on behalf of the service community. In the past two years a series of surveys has been conducted and reports produced – sometimes in collaboration with other military charities. These include:

- Lost Voices – a study into service related hearing loss;
- Household Survey – a survey of service veterans of all ages to ascertain what their particular problems and issues are.

Perhaps the most effective campaigning method employed by the Legion, which may also be of interest to other member organisations of the WVF, is to issue a non-political manifesto “wish list”, prior to a general election, of things we believe the government should be addressing on behalf of the service and veteran community. This year we asked all political parties to agree to implement policies to address 12 areas of concern and it was gratifying to note that five of those twelve have already been addressed by the new government and the others are still under discussion.

### **The Royal British Legion Scotland (Legion Scotland)**

Legion Scotland continues to help veterans of all ages, and their families, across Scotland by providing friendship, practical help and support. Our specialist advisers and network of branches all work tirelessly to make a real difference to the lives of veterans through the provision of comradeship, providing strong communities and supporting and creating a focus for remembrance.

2014 saw the launch of a new campaign to ‘re-establish our roots’. The renewed, invigorated, determined and committed approach displayed by the National Board of Trustees, head office staff, the branches and the membership has been truly magnificent. The very brave first steps in an uncertain environment, which will pave the way for the successful future of the charity and the continued expansion of the charity’s work, have now been taken. All parts of the charity are now committed to embrace change and to work together on the initiatives touching on supporting the branches and membership, promoting the organisation, fundraising and the service provision for our Scottish veterans and their families, will in turn secure our vision to the benefit of the whole ex-services community in Scotland.

**They were there for us when we needed them,  
It’s only right that we are here for them, whenever they need us**

### **Blesma The Limbless Veterans**

Blesma’s mission is to assist its people to lead independent and fulfilling lives. The Association has recently commissioned the Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University to carry out a thematic literature review on the impact of amputation on families with particular emphasis on Service families. This review will in turn lead to a research project which will have relevance across the whole of the Blesma membership - those who suffer traumatic amputation whilst serving in HM Forces and those who suffer

amputation later in life; the impact on their families may be different, leading to different needs. The result of this project will inform Blesma's service provision. Meanwhile another piece of work has been commissioned to provide evidence upon the standard of treatment for complex trans-femoral amputees once they have left the Ministry of Defence Recovery Pathway and entered the civilian arena. The quantities are small but the qualities involved are emotive.

Blesma has published a five year rolling Strategic Plan and this is already responsible for more investment in support officers, the volunteer network, and the widening Activities Programme. Care for the most infirm and those in later life is being reviewed for the mid to longer term to reflect demographic and social change, and to meet future needs effectively and efficiently.

### **Combat Stress**

Clinical research into the mental health and mental welfare needs of Scottish Veterans has been highlighted in a comprehensive scoping study produced by the Robert Gordon University instigated by the Director of Medical Services at national mental health charity for veterans Combat Stress, and funded through the Scottish Government<sup>1</sup>. This report can be downloaded from the Scottish Government website at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0041/00417172.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0041/00417172.pdf) Much of this study is applicable to the rest of the United Kingdom and has implications for veterans from other countries.

A separate research study<sup>2</sup> into the speed of clinical presentation and help seeking behaviour of combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns demonstrated that these veterans are presenting for treatment by the charity Combat Stress much earlier than expected and sooner than veterans for other wars and conflicts had presented for treatment for mental health disorders. The reasons for this are unclear however it is thought that better education and knowledge of veterans and their family members about the effects of combat on mental health including education delivered by the Ministry of Defence during military service played a major role in this.

A further research study<sup>3</sup> published in the British Medical Journal on line in March 2015 highlighted the clinical outcomes of veterans who participated in a residential six week intensive programme comprising group skills training and psychoeducation and individual trauma focused cognitive behaviour therapy. This programme is designed to treat the most severely affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and co-morbid illnesses including PTSD presenting with depression and alcohol misuse disorders. Clinical outcomes revealed highly significant reductions in symptom frequency and intensity, as well as improvement in social and occupational function.

1. Klein, S., Alexander, D., & Busuttill, W. (2013) Scoping review: A Needs-Based Assessment and Epidemiological Community-Based Survey of Ex-Service Personnel and their Families in Scotland Robert Gordon University. Aberdeen December 2012
2. van Hoorn, LA., Jones, N., Busuttill, W., Fear, NT., Wessely, S., Jones, E. Hunt, E., Greenberg, N. (2013). Iraq and Afghanistan veteran presentations to Combat Stress, since 2003. Occupational Psychiatry. doi: 10.1093/occmed/kqt017
3. Murphy D, Hodgman G, Spencer-Harper L, Hinton M, Wessely S, Busuttill W. (2015) Mental health and functional impairment outcomes following a six week intensive treatment programme for UK military veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): a naturalistic study. BMJOpen. Open 2015;5:e007051. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-007051

### **The Royal Air Forces Association**

Welfare is at the heart of the Royal Air Forces Association. Our definition of welfare is broad and wide reaching: The people we help includes serving personnel, we support all kinds of initiatives to improve morale and the working and personal lives of our servicemen and women, as well as continuing to be there for any veteran who finds themselves in need at any time after they have left the service. We do this primarily through our 61,000 members in a worldwide network of branches.

The welfare delivered by the Association can range from a regular visit to a veteran suffering the effects of loneliness and isolation to the more complex mental health and debt issues. Our 500 welfare volunteers have all attended accredited welfare training courses and adopt a person centred approach to individual's needs.

A more specialist area of support provided by the Association allows members of the RAF Family access to expert advice in relation to War Pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation scheme. Whilst Story Book Wings initiative has delivered over 2,800 stories to children of deployed parents. The scheme now includes Grandparents and those personnel attending extended training courses.

The Association is finding the needs of veterans of all ages are changing. As well as seeing an increase in more complex cases we have encountered an increasing number of cases of loneliness and isolation. As part of our on-going commitment to meeting the changing welfare needs we are introducing a Befriender Scheme which will see an increasing number of volunteers recruited to provide that extra layer of support to those suffering from the effects of loneliness and isolation.

To provide the best outcomes for our beneficiaries and to ensure we are working to best practice we are committed to supporting relevant research and to working in collaboration with other charities.