VE DAY 75

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

"Let us remember those who will not come back: their constancy and courage in battle, their sacrifice and endurance in the face of a merciless enemy; let us remember the men in all the services, and the women in all the services, who have laid down their lives.

We have come to the end of our tribulation and they are not with us at the moment of our rejoicing.

Then let us salute in proud gratitude the great host of the living who have brought us to victory."

An extract of King George VI's speech broadcast on May 8th 1945, Victory in Europe (VE) Day.

It is time for us all to unite for VE Day 75. Please help to remember, celebrate and honour our Armed Forces by returning your bunting and your special 75th anniversary gift today. Thank you.

www.britishlegion.org.uk
supportercare@britishlegion.org.uk
Supporter Care Line: 0345 845 1945

Registered Charity Number: 219279
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THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

VE DAY 75

POPPY PRESS

SPRING 2020

The day victory came home

INSIDE: 75 years of remembrance. Heartfelt stories of those who sacrificed, loved and lost.

A bittersweet reunion

COMING HOME TO THE UNKNOWN

Former Private Nick Bennion had a tough and unexpected homecoming.

Nick Bennion from Fiji wanted adventure in life, and as a Private in the First Battalion Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, that's exactly what he got. It was tough at times, serving in Iraq and Kosovo, but his comrades felt like family. They laughed together and kept their chins up.

BREAKING BONDS

After seven years, Nick left the Army to focus on his wife and three children. But his reunion was to be "tough and unexpected."

Nick realised he knew nothing about the outside world and civilian life. Financially, practically and emotionally, he didn't know how to function. Remembering that difficult time, he says:

"Sometimes as a man you feel that if you ask for help it's a sign of weakness. But we are all human beings and we all need help sometimes."

Thankfully, Nick's wife turned to the Legion, and we were able to provide the family with a deposit for a flat, their first month's rent, food vouchers, furniture and guidance on claiming benefits, to help them get back on their feet.

Now working in HM Prison, Nick has never forgotten the support he received. He says:

"I don't know where I'd be today without the Legion... life would be tough for the whole family."

Will you donate today to help provide the financial and emotional resilience that an ex-Service person needs to rebuild their life?

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

A day of happiness and heartbreak

VE Day 1945 – a day like no other. We were a nation conflicted by celebration and mourning. A nation needing to rebuild itself. There was joy, sadness, relief and anticipation. There was rekindled love and broken hearts.

But for a few hours, we celebrated. Bonfires were lit. Fireworks burst into the sky. Bunting adorned street after street, and we sang, we danced, and we drank long into the night.

The people of Britain certainly had something to celebrate. Over the coming months, 3.8 million British men and 400,000 women would return home. And after years of wartime restrictions, blackouts and bombing raids, there was relief and a readiness to commemorate finally being at peace. To aid the celebrations, Churchill made sure there were enough beer supplies in London.

(IWM) A29305

Troops pay their respects to those who died in Service.

Churchill declared 8th May 1945 a national holiday. This year, 8th May will once again become a national Bank Holiday. Join us as we celebrate and commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

The power of 'Hello'

ANTHONY'S MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

Anthony Cooper achieved his childhood dream of joining the Army.

Even from an early age, Anthony Cooper knew he wanted to serve his country. He joined the Army as soon as he could, aged 16, and says the reality of Army life was far better than he'd hoped for. The camaraderie, the fitness training and the discipline. Coops loved it all.

THE EXPLOSION THAT CHANGED ANTHONY'S LIFE FOREVER

While on patrol in Afghanistan's Helmand Province in 2010, disaster struck. Anthony stepped on a 45kg improvised explosive device (IED) – an explosive with enough force to blow up a truck. Anthony was blown to the bottom of a crater made by the blast. He'd taken the full impact.

Anthony ended up in a Birmingham hospital with severe injuries, including the loss of both his legs. A PET scan revealed what his medic described as the worst brain injury he'd seen in 25 years.

The doctors said he would never be able to speak again or push a wheelchair. But they didn't know Anthony Cooper.

Last year the Legion helped 6,614 injured Service people through funding and to live independently at home.

[IWM] MH21835

HM King George VI and Queen Elizabeth with Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret joined by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, London on VE Day.

Additionally, with places like Coventry and London left in rubble and ruins, settling back into civilian life felt an impossible feat. Thankfully, the Legion was there to help those who returned to rebuild their lives.

75 YEARS OF REUNIONS

Though much has changed during the last 75 years, one thing remains the same: the need for our support. Even today, when our Service men and women come home, the joy and relief of being reunited with their loved ones can turn to uncertainty, as they try to adapt to civilian life.

They might turn to us the day they come home. More often, they will need our help further down the line, years later. Thanks to supporters like you, we can be here with emotional, financial and physical support whenever serving and ex-serving personnel need us most.

So much has changed during the past 75 years, but the need to support our Armed Forces community has not. Please give generously today.

The RAF Victory Celebration card.

The long way home

ALBERT'S REUNION WITH ENGLAND

Adventure first. Settling down second. That was Albert Jarrett's thinking. On completing RAF training in 1943 alongside 6,000 other Caribbean men, he'd served as ground crew, driving Spitfire parts before joining bomber command in Lincolnshire. At the end of the War, Albert longed to explore. He says:

"What you have to remember, just after the War it was an adventurous time. Lots of people all over the world sought to move around. You had more to gain than to lose, so many of us just went."

After demobilisation in 1945, Jamaican-born Albert bid goodbye to England and voyaged home. But with his sights set on visiting a friend in Canada, Jamaica was only ever going to be a pit stop.

After the War, Britain encouraged immigration from Commonwealth countries, including a great many ex-Service people like Albert.

ENGLAND CALLING

Once home, Albert met up with a friend who'd served alongside him in the Airforce. The only place his friend wanted to go was back to England. Returning to Blighty sounded good to Albert too and he permanently relocated in 1953.

Settling in Sutton Coldfield – a place he knew, having been at camp there during the War, Albert married and became a father. But as part of the postwar Windrush Generation, things felt different.

Troops from the Caribbean Regiment.

D-DAY DEVASTATION AT SWORD BEACH

Eric counts himself among the lucky ones today, especially when he recalls the catastrophic scene that awaited him at Sword Beach.

"Bombs were going off all the time while the troops were still landing. At 10am I took a party onto the beach to sort out where the tanks were going... it was a dangerous place to linger."

Again, Eric felt lucky when a German Fighter Bomber missed his craft by just 50 yards. At Sword Beach, his vessel was shelled day and night, with bombs getting closer by the minute.

Eric's war memorabilia, including the boots he bought before starting Service, are still as fresh as his memories of the War.

Soon, shells were missing Eric by just 15 feet, and a comrade died in his arms on the deck. Despite the carnage, Eric got a sense that the Allied Forces were winning.

HOME TO DOREEN

After D-Day, Eric returned home for a short break. There, he found Doreen in her dance class and asked his mum to call her out. When she came outside, Eric simply said:

"Let's get married on Saturday."

Three days later, they wed and celebrated with corned beef and beer. But married life would have to wait another year...

Eric was deployed to Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, where he escorted and stripped German submarines. Then he joined the British Pacific Fleet and whilst in transit, VJ day was declared, so Eric was re-stationed in Sydney. After that he was sent to Hong Kong on a minesweeping mission, and was finally able to make his way home via the Suez Canal.

At last, Eric and Doreen's life together could begin – and 70 years of happiness followed.

When a loved one is away, whether on Service, training or engaged in humanitarian efforts, the worrying never stops. A donation from you could help give families vital support.

From the saddest day to the happiest of times

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY FROM D-DAY TO VE DAY

June 1944. Robert 'Bob' Barnett, an 18-year-old Able Seaman on board HMS Redpole, was recalled to the UK. Upon arrival, the sloop was met by an armada of ships off the coast of the Isle of Wight. Bob knew that he was about to be involved in something big.

D-Day is known as the greatest amphibious invasion in history.

Bob serving in 1943.

The mission was Operation Overlord, but history would remember it as the D-Day landings. It was a plan of epic proportions, and Bob's crew played a significant role in escorting the Canadian Brigades to Juno Beach in the initial landings. The following day they escorted the Mullberry Dock to Normandy and made repeat trips with back-up troops and supplies.

ONE DAY, MANY LIVES LOST

1,200 Canadians lost their lives on D-Day, whilst securing the foothold that ultimately helped to turn the tide on the events of the Second World War. Bob himself is lucky to have survived, and his memories of D-Day still bring a tear to his eye today:

"It is the saddest day of my life – you never forget it, never, it's always there. You were leading a group of people into, a lot of them into oblivion and some of them never got further than the beach."

EVACUATED TO THE COUNTRY AND A DIFFERENT LIFE

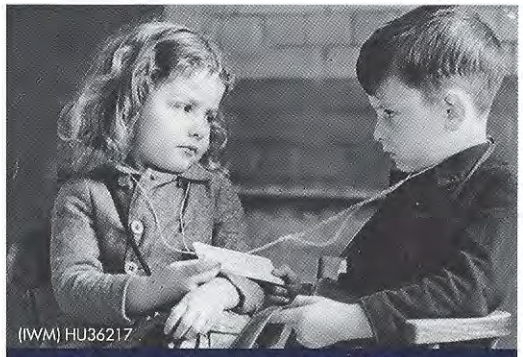
Jean Huckstepp was billeted to a home in Mid-Wales at such a young age that she could barely remember her old home in London. She remembers her wartime family with fondness:

"I lived with them for five years and it broke my heart to leave them and my friends."

When she tentatively returned at the end of the War, Jean had no idea what to expect:

"Although I was going back to England to live with Mum and Dad and my sister and brother... I was going to live in a completely different world."

A great many children like Jean came back to find their homes destroyed. Many more found that a loved one had died in Service. For the children of Operation Pied Piper, the lives they'd left five years previously no longer existed. But they had survived the War and a brave new world awaited them.



(IWM) HU36217

During Operation Pied Piper, evacuee children like these two were moved to safer locations.

Since 1945, the Legion has recognised the impact of War on children like Jean. This is why we are inviting former child evacuees to join our VE Day 75 commemorations in London, as part of our 750 strong parade of the Second World War generation.

FROM CHILD EVACUEES TO TODAY'S FORCES FAMILIES

Reunions for today's families can be equally as unsettling as Jean's. Both adults and children can find it hard to adjust and re-bond after a long time away from each other.

A donation from you today could help provide support for Forces children who are coping with the absence of a parent. Your gift could help fund a Military Kids Club session where a young person can find friendship, strength and support in their hour of need.

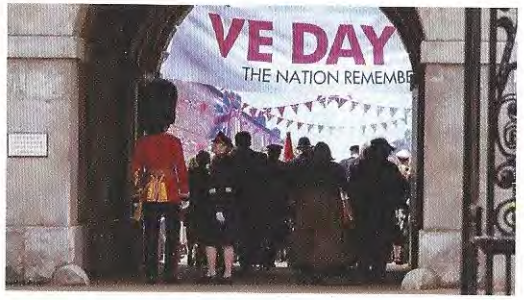
A Service family are reunited at RAF Marham.

VE DAY 75

A street party in Bristol. Men, women and children gathered together to celebrate the end of the War.

HELP TO MAKE OUR HEROES FEEL SPECIAL ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY.

In the morning of 8th May 1945, the Board of Trade announced that people could purchase red, white and blue bunting without using ration coupons. It hung in street after street in celebration of peace and victory.



To celebrate VE Day this year, the Legion will host 750 of the WW2 generation, including veterans, child evacuees and Service men and women, for a weekend of commemorative events in London.

We will be displaying bunting, reminiscent of VE day to celebrate these special veterans during this important weekend. You can be part of this momentous occasion by writing a personal message of support on your enclosed bunting to be seen by the visiting veterans.

Return your bunting by **24th April**.
For more information visit:
www.britishlegion.org.uk/reunion

Operation Pied Piper

THE CHILDREN WHO WERE SENT AWAY

In September 1939, the threat of mass bombings and deadly gas attacks shook the country to its core. Before a single shot had been fired, millions – mostly children – were moved to safer locations at home and abroad.

A Police Officer inspects a little girl's ID, just before she is evacuated.

More than 1 million children were evacuated as part of Operation Pied Piper.

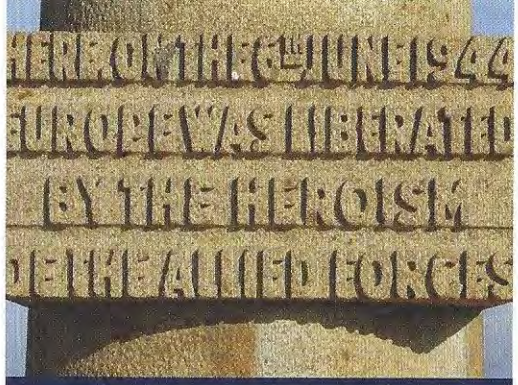
THEY CAME WALKING THROUGH THE STREETS IN THEIR DROVES

There were children of all ages, carrying gas masks and wearing name tags on their coats. They had no idea where they were going – or for how long – they just knew they had to leave their parents and everything they'd ever known.

Their fear and heartache were immeasurable, so the children sang cheerful songs like 'Wish me luck and wave me goodbye' to keep their spirits up. 'Doing the Lambeth Walk' also helped to keep the boys and girls distracted as they were quickly evacuated.

The rapid relocation took place over the course of just four days, but for many, the emotional trauma of their upheaval would stay with them forever.

"Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye, Cheerio, here I go, on my way, Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye, Not a tear, but a cheer, make it gay."



The Juno Beach Monument in Normandy, France.

Just as vivid are Bob's memories of VE Day. 11 months after the bloodshed of the Normandy Landings, Bob was in Auckland when huge celebrations broke out. He recalls it as one of the "happiest times", matched only perhaps by his reunion with his sister. She was there when Bob returned home a hero, waiting eagerly to meet him from his train at London Victoria station. With the War behind them, the siblings enjoyed a day taking in the sights of London.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BOB TO BE REUNITED WITH COMRADES

The real heroes, in Bob's eyes, were the Canadian troops he fought alongside on Juno Beach. Bob finally got to pay his respects to them last year. He, his wife Martha, and 250 other veterans were transported by the Legion to Normandy for the 75th Anniversary of D-Day. Bob had returned to Juno Beach since that historic day, but this time, his trip was extra special.

Reunited with the crew of HMS Redpole, Bob enjoyed 'swinging the lamp' with his old comrades. That's navy-speak for telling some exaggerated stories.

Like Bob, today's Armed Forces community take part in heroic missions, sometimes at the cost of their physical and mental wellbeing. Will you please turn to your donation form and help support the recovery of the brave men and women who sacrifice their all for our country?

Bob and his wife Martha in their home. The couple attended last year's D-Day commemorations on Juno Beach.

Sweethearts of the War

REUNITED ON WEDNESDAY, MARRIED BY SATURDAY

Eric served as an Officer in the Royal Navy during World War Two.

Eric and Doreen Strange were married three days after Eric returned home.

When 18-year-old Eric Strange boarded a landing craft flotilla to Normandy, he didn't know when he'd be back. But with a photo of his sweetheart in his rucksack – and a special marriage licence in place – he knew he had to make her his wife the moment he returned.

Last year, Eric came aboard the Legion's ship to Normandy to commemorate D-Day alongside Bob Barnett (see page 12).

It was the words of his beloved, Doreen, that had inspired Eric to join the navy in the first place:

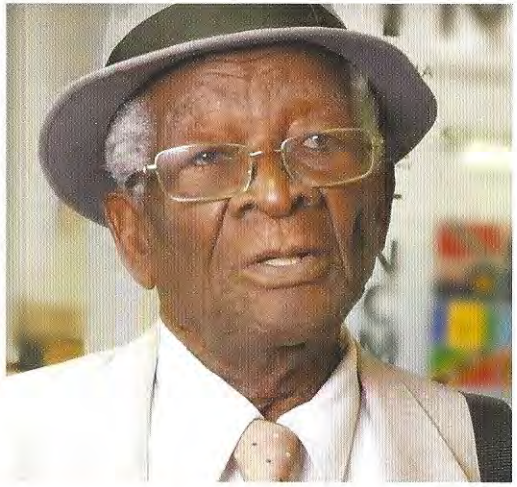
"When I was called up, I wanted to join the Royal Air Force – everyone did – but Doreen told me to go to the Navy because I looked better in blue."

And so, with his new uniform and a fresh promotion to the rank of Officer, Eric set off on his first ever mission.

A CHANGED COUNTRY

The England that Albert remembered was friendly and welcoming. During the War, women would queue to dance with him on a night out. But now, people stared at him on the street. **"Like they had never seen a black man before,"** Albert says.

But for Albert, moving back to Jamaica was not an option. With opportunities and employment scarce, he, and other members of the Windrush generation, decided to make lives for themselves in Britain.



(IWM) K7398

A Caribbean soldier, holding his baby, says goodbye to his wife.

REBUILDING BRITAIN

His decision paid off and soon the opportunities came to him. He says:

"I was given six [offers] for jobs just like that."

Britain certainly had its work cut out. We had a whole country to rebuild, and that is exactly what Albert did: he helped to rebuild Britain.

Getting work isn't always straight-forward for Army personnel when they return to civilian life. A donation from you could help someone retrain and start a whole new career when they leave the Forces.

TOGETHER IN VICTORY

Over 6 million people from the Commonwealth served in the Second World War, including 16,000 men and women, like Albert, from the Caribbean. Some were as young as 15.

On VE Day 75, we will remember, thank and honour our British, Commonwealth and Allied Forces. Together we fought, together we fell. Together, we brought victory to Europe.

**"My dear friends, this is your hour.
This is not victory of a party or of any class.
It's a victory of the Great British nation as a whole..."**

Winston Churchill, 8th May 1945

AMIDST THE REJOICING WERE 400,000 BROKEN HEARTS

But for all those who were reunited, over 400,000 men and women of the British, Commonwealth and Empire Armed Forces never returned home. For some widows and widowers of the War, the jubilation of VE Day was unbearable, and they could not bring themselves to partake in the celebrations.

A great many other people were left worrying for their loved ones still serving overseas. There are very few instances in history when our nation has experienced so many mixed emotions at once.

"Let us remember those who will not come back... we have come to the end of our tribulation and they are not with us at the moment of our rejoicing."

King George VI

AFTER THE REUNIONS, THERE WERE LIVES TO REBUILD

For those who did return, their reunions were frequently strained and sometimes painful. The Second World War left 300,000 ex-Service men and women disabled and many more disabled civilians. Thousands more bore deep emotional scars. Our Forces, and indeed their loved ones, had been changed by the War.

(IWM) H41849

Churchill waves to crowds in Whitehall on VE Day 1945.

"I had to learn to do everything again. Initially I was told I'd never be able to get myself into a wheelchair. They said I'd never walk again. But when you tell me I can't do something, it just makes me even more determined."

Anthony Cooper

REHABILITATION STARTED WITH 'HELLO'

Every reunion starts with a 'hello' but when Anthony's mum heard her son mutter this simple greeting soon after his return, it meant everything. His first sentence followed shortly after:

"Go on, get me a brew!"

Through his incredible strength, Anthony continues to exceed expectations. We're privileged to work with him, providing practical, financial and emotional support.

A NEW HOME AND NEW AMBITIONS

Anthony now has full speech. He can use a wheelchair. And, thanks to funding from the Legion, Anthony has been able to adapt his home, so he can now move around independently.

As a sociable and active person, Anthony also attributes his ability to cope with his PTSD to the peer support of the Legion Riders Branch. He regularly attends events on the back of a motorbike with his group.

You might even spot Anthony at October's Manchester Half Marathon. He'll be there in his Legion-funded racing wheelchair, determined to just beat someone. He says, **"I won't stop until I'm dead."**

A donation from you could help fund the specialist equipment or home adaptation that could vastly improve a life. Will you help other injured Service people back to independence today?

Anthony's energy and drive is an inspiration. Here he is training for the Invictus Games.

CONTENTS

PAGE 3
A day of happiness and heartbreak

PAGE 6
Sweethearts of the War

PAGE 8
Operation Pied Piper

PAGE 10
VE Day 75

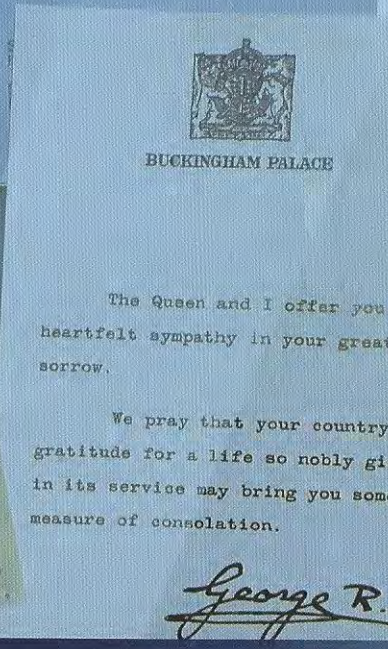
PAGE 12
From the saddest day to the happiest of times

PAGE 14
The long way home

PAGE 16
The power of 'Hello'

PAGE 18
A bittersweet reunion

VE Day in London, 8th May 1945



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you our heartfelt sympathy in your great sorrow.

We pray that your country's gratitude for a life so nobly given in its service may bring you some measure of consolation.

George R.I.

A telegram and a letter from the King, both sent to the parents of Pilot Officer J Campbell Davis, killed in Service.

While we celebrate, we must remember over 400,000 people never returned home. That's 400,000 people who never got the chance to reunite with their loved ones or celebrate victory with their comrades.

On the 75th Anniversary of VE Day, we will be remembering all those who sacrificed and never returned home along with the families that stayed indoors on VE Day and mourned their losses.

Photos courtesy of the Davis family