



MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER FOR OVERSEAS

December 2016

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM MSO (OVERSEAS)

Hello and festive wishes to you and your families. I'm not sure where this year has gone but gone it has and you have accomplished so much! This is a bumper issue due to all the Remembrance Services you wish to share. Very well done on organising and conducting some very special events.

The Poppy Appeal numbers that are coming back this year are staggering and once again Overseas are showing their worth through their numbers and innovation. Your hard work has paid off and the money you raised will help our beneficiaries all over the world in their time of need. Very well done to all of you!

Renewals are coming to an end and as you know, there is no extension this year so members need to renew by the end of December to avoid being lapsed. Renewals have been much better this year but I know the process is still not perfect and I promise to work on this for next year. Your patience has been my savior and I cannot thank you enough for bearing with me while your issues have been investigated. You have offered suggestions to problems, provided me with extra information without being asked, and gotten on with your roles magnificently. Despite having to chase me you have remained positive and friendly and this shows you are good people determined to support your charity. It is a pleasure to work with you all and I am very grateful for your support, advice and hard work.

Your MS1s are coming in thick and fast and it is obvious to me that you are all trying hard to be compliant with various rulings – Rod and I really appreciate this. If you have not got your MS1 in yet, please remember the deadline is 31st December – templates can be found in the Membership Handbook. Please remember if you do not get your MS1 in on time your branch will not be eligible to attend conference, send delegates to the Festival of Remembrance, or take part in National Elections – so please get them submitted.

SC22 forms are also due in soon, these are essential for us to know how much is raised by our Overseas branches and where it will go. Please let us shout about how great you are – tell us what you raised!

I will be sending by separate email:

- Circular for Election of Board of Trustees 2017
- Application details for National Parade Marshall
- Armed Forces Covenant in Numbers Factsheet
- Membership Council Meeting Minutes from 16th November

Please note that I will be away from the office between 24th and 27th December and again on 2nd January.

I hope you all have a lovely Christmas break and a Happy New Year. (Let's hope Santa brings some membership cards...)

Kayleigh



LATEST NEWS

Introducing the newly appointed Overseas Support Coordinator...

My name is Ian Fraser-Roe and I am delighted to have been appointed to the newly created role of Overseas Support Coordinator.

I am a former Royal Marine (Mountain & Arctic Warfare trained) and have worked for the Police as an Operational Officer and Manager, as a Lecturer in Further/Higher Education and as a Senior Service Manager with the British Red Cross.

I have a collaborative approach to team work and am driven by a desire to ensure that good practice is embedded into services whilst maintaining a people centered approach.

I am married with three grown up children and my interests include cinema, theatre, cooking and travelling.

I feel my appointment is timely given the publication of a new five year strategy and am looking forward to developing strong working relationships as we implement it overseas.



Community Support Project

The Community Support Project is now live and being used by our branches. Well done to the 15 Overseas Branches that have signed up and are reporting on their delivery of the below activities:

- Bereavement Support – 14 branches
- Awareness Events – 9 branches
- Home and Hospital Visiting – 15 branches
- Telephone Buddies Service – 9 branches
- Local Touchpoints – 3 branches

Please let me know if your branch wishes to sign up to the Branch Community Support Project or if you would like more information.

POPPY APPEAL AROUND THE GLOBE

RBL Limassol Branch, Cyprus Poppy Golf Open 2016

With the help of members of the Joint Services Golf Club (Episkopi) this has become an Annual Club Open Competition and is traditionally played on the Saturday prior to our Remembrance Day Parade. It is played at JSGC(E), Happy Valley, Episkopi. This year it was played on the 12th November 2016, with 67 Golfers taking part in this 18 hole Stableford Competition. The weather conditions were ideal for golf, a little cloud but with a temperature of 30c. The overall winner this year was John Moran. John won the Poppy Shield with 42 Stableford Points. Iona won the Ladies first prize with 38 Stableford Points. Prizes were presented by the New RBL Branch Chairman, Mr Stuart Graham. The two course meal which followed the presentation was enjoyed by all. This year €1056.84 was raised for the Poppy Appeal, and over the 11 years of the competition a total of €10,791.85 has been raised for the Poppy Appeal in Cyprus. If there are any golfers on holiday in Cyprus during next year's event who would like to play in this competition please check out the golf club website www.jsgce.org. All golfers most welcome. Thanks to everyone in Cyprus for all their support. BJ & SJWilkes.



Photograph supplied with the kind permission of Clive Clayton

Local Branches in Spain North Tally up Appeal

By District Recruiting Officer, Peggy Wyatt:

The local branches of the Royal British Legion, Torrevieja, the Orihuela Costa and Gran Alacant and La Marina in particular, have been busy raising funds for ex servicemen and their dependants since the beginning of the year. However their activities have increased dramatically in recent weeks as, together with branches across the world, they set out on their final fundraising efforts of the year with the Poppy Appeal in District Spain North.

This year the launch was carried out on 14 October in Benidorm by the city mayor, Snr Antonio Pérez Pérez, together with guests from the British Consulate as well as the Defence Attaché, Lt Col David Whimpenny, Chairman of the Legion Membership Council from London, regular attendees from the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, Arthur "Skippy" Teasdale and Wayne Campbell, looking marvellous in their scarlet coats, as well of course as many officials and members of The Royal British Legion and the public.

Since that time Gran Alacant and La Marina, Torrevieja, and the Orihuela Costa have distributed poppies and collection boxes to over 550 bars, restaurants and other locations throughout the region. In addition, the two branches mobilised their 'armies' of volunteers who have also been active at Alicante airport, all of the local markets, many supermarkets and shops as well as dozens of other venues and collection outlets, and what an amazing amount of money has so far been raised. There are still some collection tins to be emptied, so the final figure for the District will not be released yet, but we do know the totals for our three local branches, which have all concluded their collections and their counts.

Our northern most enclave in Gran Alacant/La Marina, despite being by far the smallest of the three, collected by far the highest amount per member, totalling almost €10,400.00, an increase of €300.00 on 2015.



During the week prior to Remembrance Sunday, the staff and customers of Iceland/Overs eas at San Fulgencio, Costa Blanca, Spain, donated € 1817.33 to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. The Gran Alacant and La Marina branch then presented two of the store's check-out girls with a thank-you certificate.

The photo shows left to right:

Tracey Cox and Rachel Culloty from Iceland/Overseas; Helen Goodman the RBL Branch Poppy Appeal Organiser, and Robin Hargrave, the Branch Chairman.

In Torrevieja the total collected by Branch Members was €22,163.00, an increase of over €2.700.00 on the 2015 total. Again there must be special thanks to Iceland for allowing collectors to rattle tins in their store which raised €2800.00, and to the Crescendo International Choir which donated €2000.00 to the appeal. This is a fantastic result reflecting all the hard work put into this year's appeal by the branch's Poppy People

On the Orihuela Costa the effort was organised By Eddie Coleman, where they too had yet another bumper year, largely due to the golfing fraternity and the magnificent efforts of Mick 'the Grip' Reeves and Mike Gossage who, once again, ran a series of 'Poppy Golf' tournaments.

In total, there were 40 events, which included two charity days during a fantastically busy two-month period. With that alone raising over 10,000 euro it was clear that the Branch was going to exceed last year's totals by quite some way.

Lisa Perry, the manager of Iceland in San Javier, was most welcoming to branch collectors once again, the efforts from whom raised over €3,700.00, and there was a further €4,000.00 raised at Alicante Airport by Orihuela Costa members. Together with the annual fun day, St Patrick and St George's days, as well, of course as the book stalls and many other activities carried out during the year, the branch raised €40,786.00 an increase of over €5,000.00 on 2015.



There were of course many other fundraisers carried out by all three branches during the course of the year, lots of which relied on the efforts of dozens of local entertainers and bands. They too must also be thanked for their enthusiasm and hard work, but one organisation that has been particularly supportive and loyal has been The Torreveja Pipes and Drums. They seem to have featured at just about every single RBL event during the year with their efforts helping to achieve yet another magnificent total.

And testament to Gran Alacant & La Marina, Torreveja and the Orihuela Costa, is that all of their fundraising activities have been carried out extremely professionally, with the minimum of fuss and with the maximum of effort and support from both within and without the branches. An amazing achievement. Well done to everyone involved in achieving a grand total of over **€73,000.00**.

Image Vs Reality

Having just announced a record breaking **€8753.12** for the Poppy Appeal in 2016 the Mollina branch of the Royal British Legion Spain North District is straight back into fundraising mode determined to reach that elusive €10,000 figure in 2017. When the name of the organisation is mentioned the image which springs to mind is men in uniform marching behind standards and wearing berets, nothing could be further from the truth.

The vast sums raised are achieved by people from all walks of life coming together and having fun in comradeship and harmony. Lesley Gonella Poppy organiser for the branch said "We have some great times and the social committee try very hard to vary events to suit all tastes"

The next such event is the Grand Festive Draw to be held on Tuesday 24th January to be held at 11am at Parque La Vina in Mollina. Over 20 high value prizes have been donated and all are welcome to buy tickets beforehand and attend the draw . You do not have to be a member to attend the branch events but as a service history is not required why not contact Tom Mclean on tommac23@aol.com

REMEMBRANCE AROUND THE GLOBE

And Then There Were Two

On the 11th November for the last eight years the Mollina branch of The Royal British has held a service of remembrance timed to coincide with events in Westminster. Each year the branch Standard held solitary watch over proceedings but this year the Standard from nearby Loja branch which was only dedicated on 23rd of October joined in the celebrations. Bob Adams (Chairman) said: "Loja branch were delighted to join members and friends of Mollina (100+) in their annual Service of Remembrance, particularly as there are relatively few opportunities to unfurl the standard in the Legion year and our branch has only recently raised funds for our own Standard".

The service was conducted by Reverend Doreen Cage, Mollina branch chaplain assisted by Chris Roddiss and Marty Power. In her address to the congregation Rev Doreen stressed the importance of telling and retelling the stories of conflict in order to prevent history repeating itself.

Lez Gonella Poppy Appeal coordinator for Mollina branch emphasised the importance of the event in the branch calendar but reminded members that it was the fundraising events throughout the year which raised the bulk of the money which was spent supporting beneficiaries.



Paphos Service of Remembrance

The 2016 Service of Remembrance in Paphos was attended by an estimated two thousand people including veterans, members of the public as well as holiday makers of many nationalities.



Alexandra Studios - Wedding & Lifestyle Photography

The Paphos Branch was formed in 2014, making it one of the youngest Overseas Branches, and it achieved great success in 2015 with an estimated eight hundred people attending its first Service of Remembrance.

To plan for the 2016 Service of Remembrance, Helen Caplan, the branch events organiser got to work. With many special relationships now formed within the community, they were now able to advertise the Service. Elaine Nicholls, Poppy Appeal Organiser ensured posters went out with all the poppy boxes and the local newspaper the "Paphos Post" ran a write up.

The day started early setting up both Poppy Memorabilia and Membership gazebos and setting out 1,000 chairs - the branch questioned whether they would be filled. They were not to be disappointed as at 10:00am, to the sound of the bagpipes played by John McDonald, the crowds flocked in and by 10:15am it is estimated that 1700 people were in place with more arriving. The harbour restaurants were also packed with people wearing poppies.

Just before the service was about to start a huge roar of motorbikes was heard, their engines deafening the crowd. In came a large motorbike club proudly wearing military regalia on their leathers, they parked their bikes in a row at the back of the crowd and respectfully took their places in time for the service to begin.

The Service began with the marching in of the Standards. The Royal Marines Association followed by the Branch Standard held by Standard Bearer Tim Barry, he was in turn followed by both The TLC and Aspire school Standards who were accompanied by their respective choirs who once in place began to perform their songs which they sang beautifully.

Judith Evans Davies then sang "Going Home" her voice was so powerful it truly hit the crowd with raw emotion.



The Branch Padre Allan Hodgson began the service, and the first hymn "Oh God, Our Help in ages past" was sung by the congregation with such enthusiasm, as they were spurred on by both schools and Judith.

The Padre continued with the service and the Act of Remembrance was duly observed, you could have heard a pin drop during the Two Minutes Silence.

Christine Smith Vice Consul of the British High Commission in Nicosia laid the first wreath, which was followed by many more including Pete Neighbour a veteran of the Suez Crisis, who laid a wreath marking the 50th Anniversary of that event, many more wreaths were laid and many members of the audience came forward to lay their personal tributes.

Another hymn was sung and the service continued with a reading by the Reverend G. Hill, the Branch Padre Allan Hodgson then gave the Address, Allan drew attention to the need to recognise a new generation of veterans who with the memories of conflict, sometimes suffer in silence, he brought their attention to PTSD (*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*), and many in the audience were visibly touched and brought to tears, their attention was well and truly drawn to the fact that although we remember the fallen, we should also not forget the living and to do all we can to enable them to LIVE ON.



It was estimated that close on two thousand people attended the 2016 Service of Remembrance in Paphos.

The Paphos Branch raised in excess of €11,000.00 for the Poppy Appeal, during the period.

The Paphos Branch, Committee and Members would like to say a big thank you to all those people that attended the Service of Remembrance at Paphos Harbour and we look forward to seeing you all again in 2017.

Photographs courtesy of Alexandra Hinton.

La Val d'Albaida Branch Service of Remembrance



By Tim Greensides,
Branch Chairman:

"The highlight of our year, as a relatively small Branch inland Spain was our Service of Remembrance, carried out on the 13th November, ably orchestrated by our Branch Chaplain, Ken Cornforth, Standard Bearer John Gunning and music by the Branch Chairman. As always the Last Post was sounded at the appropriate time, during the 2 minutes' silence, many Church Bells could be heard in the Area, which was special. At the end of our Service the Normal Elgar's Nimrod, was replaced by a Vocal from Colette Cassin and the Bristol Junior

Bach Choir. "Forever Young" in a tribute to our Fallen Heroes in Afghanistan, who were honoured on their return by "Royal Wotton Bassett" (not a dry eye).

Gran Alacant & La Marina Branch Service of Remembrance

Gran Alacant & La Marina Branch of the Royal British Legion, in association with the Ayuntamiento of San Fulgencio, held their annual Service of Remembrance on Sunday 13th November.



This open-air service was held in the main square of San Fulgencio – the Plaza de Constitución. It was conducted in both Spanish and English, by a Catholic Priest Jose Francisco, and an Anglican Priest, the Reverend Terry Baxter.

In attendance were Lieutenant Salvador of the Guardia Civil; Chief Martin of the Policia Local, and six councillors from both the ruling team, and the opposition. These included the councillor for European residents, Paulino Herrero.

They were accompanied by more than 100 local residents of both nationalities.

The Last Post and Reveille were played by former Royal Marine, John Atkins.

Following the service, wreathes were laid at the temporary altar, and were later transferred to the altar inside the church. The branch meets at 6pm, on the first Monday of each month, at Amigos Bar, Avenida Escandinavia, Gran Alacant.

For more information, phone Robin on 966 695 423 or Brian on 639 917 971; or e-mail granalacant.secretary@gmail.com

Mojacar Remembrance

On Remembrance Sunday 13th November 100 people attended the Service at the St Pascual Anglican Church of Mojacar at which the locum Priest, Father Keith, officiated. Before the Service David Weir entertained with music on the bagpipes at his final appearance as he is returning to the UK. The Branch Standard was paraded by Mick Coote and a wreath was laid by the Chairman, Andrew Richardson. After the Service, 64 people joined together for lunch at Sensations restaurant.



Pinoso Remembrance Service

On Sunday 13th November, the Pinoso branch of the Royal British Legion in Spain held its annual Service of Remembrance at the Parochial Church of St. Peter. A wreath was laid by Branch Chairman Mr. Frank Ring. The service was attended by a large Spanish and British congregation and was conducted by Father Manuel Llopis and Maggie Rees from the Pinoso Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Local Spanish Band the Union Lirica Pinosense played during the service and their Solo trumpeter played flawless renditions of The Last Post & Reveille.

Pinoso and District Trefoil Guild also attended, a wreath was carried by Cherry Wilson and Ann Gibbins was the Standard Bearer.

Afterward, members of the Royal British Legion and their guests, enjoyed lunch at Meson Tonet restaurant. Special thanks to everyone who made this such a successful day.



It's a long way to Tipperary...

And its a long way from Mollina to Gibraltar... but each year a coach full of intrepid RBL supporters make the trip to join in with Remembrance celebrations at the British Protectorate. Leaving at 7am to ensure mustering on time meant many members had to set off at 6am on a very cold autumn day.

Led by standard bearer Colin Lamb, the contingent marched on the parade to the Cenotaph where Lt .General Ed Davis inspected the parade and spoke to many individuals. This year Mollina branches wreath was laid by their vice chairman Chris Roddiss who said "I am proud to lay this wreath on behalf of the RBL members of Mollina branch many of whom would have liked to have been here but due to circumstances could not."

After the parade was dismissed members refreshed themselves at some of the colony's bars and restaurants before the compulsory shopping trip to Morrisons and then the long trek home.



IN OTHER NEWS...

The Hondon Valley Branch Visit “Top Gun”

A few months ago, following the attendance at a Hondón Valley Branch meeting by Sgt (Dai) Williams RAF, a seed was sown to try and organise a visit to the Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP) based at Los Llanos Military Airbase, Albacete. TLP delivers training courses for NATO pilots and support personnel. During these courses they hold open days (petting zoos) exclusively for course participants. It was decided that a visit during one of these open days would be an enjoyable and rare opportunity for TRBL members to engage with military personnel and aircraft from many different nations. Following a confirmatory trip and some intense planning and organisation, Hondón Valley Branch members headed north to Albacete on Thursday 17th November.

With a full coach of rather exited aviation fans, we were met and very professionally hosted all day by Sgt Williams. After a hot beverage in the Airman’s Canteen, we were given a guided tour of the Students’ Accommodation, recreation areas and facilities. A rather filling 3 course lunch then followed in the Air Base restaurant.

The TLP Commandant, Colonel Luis Villar Coloma and Suboficial mayor (WO) Zaranton formally welcomed the Group to Los Llanos Airbase and the TLP Facilities. In return Nigel Hails, District Chairman, thanked them for their co-operation and assistance in enabling the visit to go ahead.

The next activity was an important safety briefing before being ‘Let Loose’ onto the Runway/Flight line for 2 hours.

The Branch members were spellbound by the informality and closeness you could achieve with 35 different NATO Fighter – Jets, Pilots and ground crew were on site to give guided tours of their respective aircraft, answer any questions and help visitors into the cockpits for the amazing photograph opportunities.

During the Flight line visit Cpl Simmons (RAF), very kindly donated the unit’s Poppy Appeal contributions to the Branch. The photograph opportunity for this event was taken in front of a Royal Air Force Hawk Jet.

Reluctantly the Branch were then gathered together before a Group-Team photograph. The Base memorabilia shop opened selling an array of “Top Gun Aviator” type goodies, clothing and merchandise.

After a cold drink and some farewells, the Branch were mustered onto the coach and returned to Home Base, the Hondon Valley.

The Branch would like to extend a massive thankyou to the TLP Commandant and his team based at Los Llanos.

The November weather was perfect. The sun shone in blue skies and Branch members will remember the visit for a long time.



Loja Branch Standard Dedication

The Loja Branch from District Spain South was formed in November 2009. At that time there were just enough members to formally open the branch.

Between 2009 and 2014 the Branch grew slowly and eventually maintained membership level of around 30 members. In April 2015 the Branch had voted to buy its own Standard and the members set about organising boot fairs, table top sales and other such fundraising activities. The Chairman estimated that it would take around 2 years to gather sufficient funds. They needed to raise well in excess of £1000.00.

Many days of travelling and hard work followed, the Standard fund began to gather pace and grow. The Branch held its



Christmas function in December 2015 and the Chairman was able to announce that the branch had already collected sufficient funds to not only buy the Standard but all the ancillaries to go with it.

A fantastic achievement for such a small branch. All due to the hard work of the Branch members and the generosity of local communities.

During the following months, plans were made to dedicate the Standard at a Church Service in Salinas, a small village on the border of Granada and Malaga provinces. The Service took place on 23rd October and was attended by Branch members and guests from other local Branches.

The Loja Branch Standard is now being paraded with pride.



Tribute to Scott Goodall MBE. 1935-2016 (Member of the Bordeaux Branch)

In fondest memory and thanks to Scott on behalf of the Royal British Legion for all his help and assistance over the years enabling the Legion walkers to raise thousands of pounds for the Poppy Appeal by taking part in The Freedom Trail (Le Chemin de la Liberte) Commemorative Walk.

Poppy Heirlooms in Zurgena

Mrs Gillian Robson is a member of the Zurgena and District Branch in Almeria and at a recent meeting was wearing a lovely poppy brooch. The background is that this brooch was awarded to Gillian's grandmother (Sally Gill) in 1971 for 50 years dedicated service to The Royal British Legion. Mrs Gill from Trimdon, County Durham, joined The British Legion (as it was originally called) in 1921, when the Charity was founded. She was still selling poppies at the ripe old age of 97 – a tremendous commitment.

Gillian said she feels so proud to be wearing this lovely brooch – a symbol of the work and dedication of her grandmother. It has become a real family heirloom.



OPERATIONS UPDATE:

Update from Donna Wilson – Country Welfare Officer

In the latter part of 2016 we have delivered five Overseas Caseworker Training courses , in three locations across Spain .As part of this training programme, ten new overseas caseworkers have been trained and thirty two experienced caseworkers, trained in the new model of working .

We now have sixty six overseas caseworkers, covering Spain, Portugal and Malta, who have received CMS training - with approximately a third of this number having successfully completed cases on the live CMS system.

Dates for an Overseas Caseworker course in Spain and update courses to be held in Spain, Portugal and Malta during 2017 will be confirmed in the New Year.

Thanks to all the Overseas Caseworkers, both new and experienced, for taking the time to attend the courses and for the valuable and positive contribution they each made. We look forward to working with and continuing to support the overseas caseworkers in 2017.

Wishing all our overseas volunteers and members a very Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Donna

Update from Meagan Levin – Overseas Case Officer

This year we have been very busy with overseas caseworker training. We ran three courses at Head Office and a CMS training course before the Overseas Forum at National Conference. In total we trained 9 new caseworkers over 3 courses. These courses also included 15 more experienced caseworkers who were trained in the new way of working. All the caseworkers were trained in the use of the Case Management System and many have started using it to manage cases both at branch level and cases that Head Office have sight of.

Next year we hope to run 3 caseworker courses in the UK:

- Weds 17th & Thurs 18th May 2017- Merseyside and Cheshire Area Office (This course is being run the weekend before Annual Conference. There will be a minimum of 12 places on the course)
- Thursday 7th and Fri 8th of September - Haig House
- Thurs 30th and Fri 1st December - Haig House

Both of these courses have capacity for 12 participants each. If you would like to attend any of these courses please email OverseasOps@britishlegion.org.uk

Big White Wall

Big White Wall is a digital service that provides safe and anonymous support to anyone struggling with a range of common mental health issues, or who feel burdened by everyday worries and concerns and helps them to manage their own health. It is free to join for all serving personnel, veterans, and their families and is available around the clock (24/7) at www.bigwhitewall.com , and via a smartphone app for iOS and Android.

Members can talk to each other anonymously and share experiences, express themselves in images, and follow guided self-help courses on topics such as managing anxiety, stopping smoking, dealing with alcohol, and getting better sleep. There is also a range of clinical tests, guides and tips to improve wellbeing including articles on self-esteem, relationships and many more. The service is staffed by trained counsellors (called Wall Guides) who are on hand at all times to moderate the service and make sure the community is safe, anonymous and supportive, and everyone stays anonymous.

Go to www.bigwhitewall.com for more information or to join. To join the free service for serving personnel, veterans and their families once on the website click on the **join now** box at the top of the page which will take you to a page where you see a box titled UK Armed Forces – click on **select**.

The Royal British Legion's Veterans Hearing Fund

HM Treasury provided TRBL with £10million in 2015 to create the Veterans Hearing Fund (VHF). The grant, using fines associated with the LIBOR rate fixing scandal, was due in no small part to our '[Lost Voices](#)' report. Lost Voices highlighted the very real impact of Service on hearing health; one of its findings was that working age veterans are **3.5 times more likely** to suffer from hearing loss than the general population. The report called on Government to make support available to those affected.

After much consultation with the MOD, NHS England and the Devolved Administrations, and a swathe of expert clinicians and academics, VHF launched just over one year ago. In a very short period of time, we have already received 400 applications for support. We know that's only the tip of the iceberg – it estimated that more than 300,000 veterans of HM Armed Forces suffer with hearing impairment related to their Service. (See below for information on eligibility and application process.)

VHF typically provides grants to purchase:

- high specification hearing aids, including those with tinnitus support
- peripheral devices such as Bluetooth streamers or telephones
- therapies and classes such as cognitive behavioural therapy for those who suffer from tinnitus, or lip-reading classes for those who find that technology isn't enough

The purpose of VHF is to maximise wellbeing – in effect, we want to reduce disadvantage to those who Served. Feedback from successful applicants includes, 'I can hear birdsong for the first time in years' and 'Now I can go swimming with my daughter and still be able to hear her'. Hearing loss and tinnitus can be a significant barrier to living a comfortable life, and VHF can help overcome it.

VHF is eligible to veterans or reservists of HM Armed Forces who acquired hearing impairment during Service. This is usually evidenced by reviewing in-Service medical records or through official correspondence attributing hearing impairment to Service. There is not, however, a firm requirement that hearing impairment be formally recognised by Government as *attributable* to Service. The programme was built to be as accessible to as many people as possible. It is usually sufficient to demonstrate that there was a deterioration in hearing health while Serving.

Applications to VHF are two-stage. The **eligibility stage** is completed by the applicant. The Medical Grants Officers assess the available evidence (typically medical records received through a Subject Access Request [SAR]) to determine whether hearing impairment was acquired during Service.

Evidence: *Unless* the applicant has official correspondence attributing their hearing impairment to Service, applicants must secure their in-Service audiometry records to TRBL with their VHF eligibility application. SARs must be submitted by the applicant to the appropriate MOD disclosure cell. MOD's current processing time for medical records is up to 40 calendar days. If the applicant *does* have correspondence attributing hearing impairment to Service, a copy of that letter should be sent to TRBL with their VHF eligibility application.

The **second stage** application is a much more comprehensive assessment which must be completed by an audiologist and submitted by them to TRBL's Medical Grants Officers. The application will include recommendations for appropriate equipment or services. Note that applicants should under no circumstances purchase equipment themselves, as we are unable to reimburse the cost.

Unfortunately, TRBL does not have an equivalent programme for spouses or dependants, and is unable to consider support for hearing impairment where that impairment is *not* related to Service.

VHF is available to veterans and reservists of HM Armed Forces regardless of where they live. For more information, including SAR and VHF application forms, please visit www.rbl.org.uk/hearing.

**THE NEXT OVERSEAS NEWSLETTER WILL BE SENT OUT AT THE END OF FEBRUARY,
PLEASE SEND ANY NEWS ITEMS TO OVERSEASSUPPORT@BRITISHLEGION.ORG.UK**

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR