Website https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/rushden/

We meet every second Monday of the month at The Athletic Club, 61 Newton Road, Rushden, NN10 0HF commencing 7.30pm. Visitors are welcome. It is NOT a requirement to have served in HM Forces to be a member of the Royal British Legion.

RBL RUSHDEN BRANCH NEWSLETTER FOR MARCH & APRIL 2026

We remember the nation honours more than 53,000 British veterans who served in the Gulf War. It is 35 years since the UK Armed Forces played a major role in driving Iraqi forces from Kuwait, with 47 British personnel sadly losing their lives. We will always remember them.

GAMES NIGHT – Monday 9th March

Come along to the Branch Games Night on Monday 9th March 2026. Doors and Bar opens from 6.30pm and games start at 7.30pm. The Committee has laid on Play Your Cards Right, Bingo, Cornhole, Buzz Wire and a Table Team Quiz. Nibbles are available too. Local RBL Branches have been invited to come along; this is a great opportunity to make new friends, have a healthy bit of banter, fun and competitiveness. Please come along and support your Branch.

A FASCINATING STORY FROM PAUL MCKAY - Tuesday 10th March

On Tuesday 10th March, Branch Vice Chair Paul McKay will be Guest Speaker at the RAFA Rushden & District Members' Meeting, held at the Windmill Club, Glassbrook Road, Rushden, NN10 9RP, commencing at 7:30pm.

Paul shares what happens when you swap polished shoes and parade grounds for walking boots, blister plasters and an ancient pilgrim trail walking the historic Camino de Santiago; a journey that tests body, mind, patience and occasionally faith in hostel hygiene and French Spanish mapreading.

Blending humour, hardship and honest reflection, his entertaining talk explores:

- What veterans carry with them long after the uniform is hung up.
- How resilience, service and camaraderie unexpectedly resurface on the trail.
- New friendships forged between sore feet, shared meals and dodgy bunks.
- Why purpose and belonging does not end with active service.

Expect some good-natured tri-service banter, humility and a few hard-earned lessons from hundreds of miles on foot. Come for the stories. Stay for the camaraderie. I think this was explained by a statement that Paul made in the past along the lines of, *"How far can a Veteran walk without a NAAFI break?"* 😊

Paul's talk is open to the RNA, RBL and the Northants Breakfast Club. Please note that the RAF Association charges all members every meeting (except the Speaker + Wife) a nominal charge to help keep their social fund afloat. That charge is £2 a head. Please let either Lynne or Jake know if you wish to attend, via email or Mobile Number **07525 441267.** This will enable the RAF Association Committee to ensure sufficient seating and space.

WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENT WE CAN ALL GET INVOVED IN – 11th MARCH 2026

Come and listen to Branch Community Supporter Paul McKay's presentation at The Wellingborough Museum,12 Castle Way, Wellingborough, NN8 1XB about ***'Joining the Dots: Supporting Veterans Within Our Communities'*** at 0930 hours for a 1000 hour start on Wednesday 11th March 2026. It will be held like a Townhall themed event and is an ideal opportunity for Members to attend, whether Veterans or not share, and air their views. Please contact Jake Baker asap on **07525 441267 i**f you wish to attend. This is vital due to limited seating spaces.

Less than TWO weeks to go until the RNA Quiz Night! ✨🧠

Who will be the winners this year? ⏳

Will it be the brains of Bozeat, the bright sparks from Rushden, the masterminds of Higham… or a strong showing from further afield, maybe the RBL, RAFA, or NBC?

There's only one way to find out!

RBL WELFARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

DO YOU NEED ANY HELP, OR DO YOU KNOW A VETERAN OR RBL MEMBER WHO NEEDS HELP? IF SO, PLEASE CALL OUR BRANCH COMMUNITY SUPPORTER, PAUL MCKAY AT 07305 837099 OR VIA EMAIL (SEE WHO'S WHO ON PAGE 7). YOU CAN ALSO CONTACT THE BRANCH COMMUNITY COORDINATOR, PETER ARMSTRONG ON 07498 243683. HIS EMAIL ADDRESS IS ALSO AT WHO'S WHO?

REMEMBER, THE RBL IS HERE FOR YOU. IF THEY CAN'T HELP, THEY'LL GET YOU HELP. PLEASE BEAR IN MIND THAT EVERY SITUATION IS DIFFERENT.

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

2nd to 4th May – East Midlands Steam & Country Show, Lancaster Farm, Chelveston

27th June – Armed Forces Day organised by the Rushden & District Veterans' Group

28th June – Yelden Strawberry Fayre

11th July – Party in the Park

2nd August – Classic Car Show

If you can help out, even just for an hour or two, then contact our Events Coordinator Ray Burke on **07853 085368** or ramondo4@yahoo.co.uk

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS

First Monday of every month – Northants Breakfast Club – Hatton Hall Lounge, Hatton Hall, Hatton Avenue, Wellingborough, NN8 5AP commencing 9.30am. The next meeting will be on Monday 2nd March. **Note: There will not be a meeting on Easter Monday 6th April.**

Second Monday of every month except March, June, September and December – Branch Monthly Meetings at the Athletic Club commencing 7.30pm. The next Branch Monthly Meeting is on 13th April 2026, which will be followed by the Speaker Karen Jamieson ARRC about *"Help for Heroes"*

Fourth Tuesday of every month – The Community Social & Craft Group meet at the Rushden Athletic Club on Newton Road, between 1pm and 3pm. RAFA Members Free. Guests £3/entry or £20 per year. Open to any RBL Rushden Branch Member. For more information contact Carol on **07922 141589** or carol.easton12@gmail.com Next meets are on 24th March and 28th April.

Every Wednesday & Saturday Morning – 9am start. Northants Breakfast Club **(NBC)** dine at The Needle and Awl. All Veterans are welcome. Families are invited to join on the last Saturday of each month, which will be on 28th March and 25th April.

First Thursday of every month – 10am to 12.30pm – **Friends of the Legion** meet at The Athletic Club, Newton Road, Rushden. Pop along for a cuppa and a chat any time between 10am and 12.30pm. The next meets are on 5th March and 2nd April.

Second Thursday of every month - NGH Breakfast Club at Northampton General Hospital, Cliftonville, Northampton, NN1 5BD. **Eat Street** is the hospital restaurant on the main corridor through the hospital opposite the Chapel. The Breakfast Club is open to **all veterans (staff, patients and public).** Attendees to purchase their own breakfast and drinks. The next **NGH Breakfast Club** meets are on 12th March and 9th April.

Last Thursday of Every Month – 10am -11.30am – Bilton Court Care Home would like to invite you to their **Veterans Coffee Morning** at Bilton Court Care Home, Queensway, Wellingborough, NN8 3FR. For more details phone **01933 401613** or pop in.

The next **Veterans Coffee Mornings** are on 26th March and 30th April.

Last Friday of every month – 9am start – **KGH Breakfast Club** at Kettering General Hospital, Rothwell Road, Kettering, NN16 8UZ. The Basement Brassiere is located on the lower ground floor of the main hospital building. The Breakfast Club is open to **all veterans (staff, patients and public).** Attendees to purchase their own breakfast and drinks. The next **KGH Breakfast Club** meets are on 27th March and 24th April.

RBL RUSHDEN BRANCH MEMBER & VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

As we work to strengthen connections, member feedback is invaluable. This short survey will help us improve engagement, enhance our activities, and ensure we continue delivering meaningful value to all members. You will find attached to this Newsletter a short survey. Please complete this, print it off and hand it in at either the Branch Social on 9th March or at the next Branch meeting on 13th April 2026. The survey is anonymised, so please place them in the cardboard post box that will be left at the Bar and sealed in the provided envelopes if members wish.

RBL COUNTY CHAIR PRESENTS AWARDS AT THIS YEAR'S FIRST BRANCH MONTHLY MEETING

RBL Northamptonshire County Chairman Ian Byrnes attended January's Branch Meeting and personally presented the County Chairman's Certificate of Appreciation to Branch President David Hawker, who was unfortunately unwell at the January 2026 Annual County Conference, as mentioned in the January/February 2026 Newsletter. **Below left:** Ian took the opportunity to inform the 22 members present the importance of recruiting and how we can all do our part to increase our membership. **Below right:** David Hawker receiving his framed Certificate.

Above left: Branch Standard Bearer Mark Taberner-Stokes receives the County's Certificate of Attendance as a Standard Bearer at an RBL County Conference. **Above right:** Branch Chair Jake Baker received the Beacon Branch's Gold Award on behalf of the Branch. The Beacon Branch Gold Award is a prestigious recognition for branches that demonstrate exceptional performance, community engagement, and adherence to RBL values. It highlights branches that excel in collaboration, innovation, and support for the Armed Forces community.

ELECTED: PAUL ANTHONY MCKAY CMGR FCMI FINSTLM

I am honoured to have been elected as the Southeast Midlands Membership Council Representative for 2026. I take this responsibility seriously and am committed to representing the voices, concerns and aspirations of members across our area with integrity and professionalism.

My background spans a 30-year military career followed by senior leadership roles in government, diplomacy and international business. Commissioned from Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth, I served in aviation command and operational appointments, requiring decisive leadership, sound judgement and a constant focus on welfare. Those years reinforced a simple principle: leadership is about service, integrity and looking after people.

Following military service, I spent two decades overseas in senior executive positions, including Chief Executive Officer and Chief Strategy Officer roles within complex multinational organisations. These appointments required strong governance, financial discipline, risk management and ethical decision-making; disciplines directly relevant to the responsibilities of charity leadership.

Alongside my professional career, I have remained actively engaged in the Armed Forces community and the wider veterans' charity sector, serving in elected volunteer officer roles at Branch, County and National levels. This involvement has provided first-hand insight into the challenges our members face, from welfare concerns to branch sustainability and meaningful member engagement.

As Membership Council Representative, my priorities are clear:

- Strengthening the Member Voice across Southeast Midlands
- Supporting good governance and accountability
- Encouraging constructive dialogue between members and national structures
- Promoting inclusion, respect and shared ownership within our Legion
- Helping ensure the Legion remains resilient, relevant and responsive

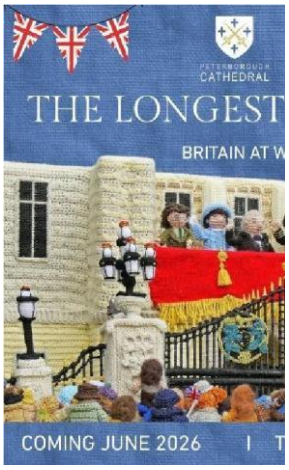
Effective representation requires listening carefully, communicating clearly and challenging constructively when necessary. I am committed to transparency, professionalism and always acting in the best interests of the Legion and its beneficiaries.

The RBL stands at a key point in its strategic journey. Our ability to support today's Armed Forces community and future generations, depends upon engaged membership, strong governance and unity of purpose. I am motivated by a simple principle: to give back to the organisation that supports those who have served.

I look forward to collaborating with members across our area and welcome your engagement, ideas and feedback, as we move forward together.

Editor's Note: On behalf of all Members, a huge congratulations is conveyed to Paul who has great drive and energy and will serve the Counties and the RBL well. He will unfortunately have to step down as our Branch Vice Chair, but fortunately may remain as a member of RBL Rushden Branch and wishes to continue his role as a Branch Community Supporter; we wish him well in his future endeavours and thank him for all he has done for RBL Rushden Branch.

THE LONGEST YARN II: BRITAIN AT WAR: 3RD JUNE - 4TH JULY 2026



Building on the popularity of last year's exhibition ***"The Longest Yarn"***, Peterborough Cathedral is pleased to present its much-anticipated sequel, ***"The Longest Yarn II: Britain at War."***
This remarkable exhibition features 80 intricately crafted panels of "wool art", each one metre in length, telling the story of life in Britain from the declaration of war on 3rd September 1939 to VE Day on 8th May 1945. Visitors will encounter key moments including the King's Speech, the Blitz, D-Day, the bombing of major cities, the Home Guard, the Women's Land Army, rationing, and the resilience of communities across the country.

Alongside the panels, visitors will meet 'The Gang' - eight life-size figures representing the people who carried Britain through the war, from a Land Girl to a Spitfire pilot, bringing these stories vividly to life within the Cathedral setting.

DEPENDING ON BRANCH MEMBERS WISHES AT THE APRIL BRANCH MEETING, THERE MAY BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A DAY TRIP TO PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL

RBL HELPLINE – 0808 802 8080 - CALL 8am to 8pm 7 DAYS A WEEK

RBL ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE – 8TH – 10TH MAY 2026

Find out more or register your place via the Annual Conference webpage.

Registration to attend in person closes 12pm midday 23rd March. Registration to attend online closes 12pm midday 6th April.

The RBL Annual Conference 2026 will take place at the Brighton Centre, located right on the seafront of the vibrant southeastern seaside town of Brighton, East Sussex. Please note, late registrations may not be accepted.

During registration, details will be collected concerning mobility and medical requirements, and expenses details for voting delegates who are attending in person. On completion of registration, you will receive an automatic acknowledgement.

The RBL regrets that they cannot accept applications sent by post or email. For nondelegate registration queries, please contact membershipservices@britishlegion.org.uk

Who can attend? In-person and online attendance is open to all members and their accompanying guests or carers.

REQUEST FOR DONATIONS FOR BOTTLE TOMBOLAS

The Branch is very successful in fundraising events and especially in our Bottle Tombolas. It is intended to hold Bottle Tombolas at both the East Midlands Steam & Country Show and the Rushden Classic Car Show. We are looking to building up a supply of bottle and jar goods, any bottled goods such as coffee, in date food produce, soft and alcoholic drinks, toiletries such as gels, shampoo, etc but not cleaning materials or detergents. Please bring your donations to any Committee Member or contact any Committee Member for collection arrangements. **Note:** Raffle Prizes are also always welcome at our monthly meetings.

COUNTY YOUTH OFFICER – PETER ARMSTRONG

Members are informed that there is an addendum to last month's article on Pages 7 and 8 and that is concerning new youth members. Please note that:

"New Youth Members should either be an RBL Youth Standard Bearer or part of a licensed RBL Band. Existing Youth Members will retain their membership status until their 18th birthday, when they are eligible to become full Members, should they choose to do so."

Worth noting for members encouraging their young relatives, friends, etc to join the RBL.

WHO'S WHO IN OUR BRANCH?

President - David Hawker: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Chair/Media Rep: Jake Baker rushden.chairman@rbl.community **07525 441267**
Vice Chair – Paul McKay: rushden.vicechairman@rbl.community **07305 837099**
Secretary – Lynne Baker: rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Treasurer – Janet Flowers: rushden.treasurer@rbl.community
Standard Bearer - Mark Taberner-Stokes: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Youth Member Standard Bearer - Theo Mizon: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Committee Member – Heather Phillip: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Committee Member – Sally Morton: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Committee Member – Ray Burke: ramondo4@yahoo.co.uk **07853 085368**
Committee Member – Steve Miller: via rushden.secretary@rbl.community
Branch Padre – Pauline Cook: richardpaulinec@yahoo.co.uk **07871 923337**
Deputy Branch Padre – Richard Cook: richardpaulinec@yahoo.co.uk **07871 923337**
BCC – Peter Armstrong: rushden.bcc1@rbl.community **07498 243683** **BCS & BCC – Paul McKay:** rushden.bcc2@rbl.community or rushden.vicechairman@rbl.community also PMcKay.BCS@rbl.community or **07305 837099**
Poppy Appeal Organiser – Ruth Miller: poppyappealrushden@gmail.com
Deputy Poppy Appeal Organiser – Steve Miller: poppyappealrushden@gmail.com

WHO IS THE MINISTER FOR VETERANS AND PEOPLE

The Minister for Veterans and People in the UK government is Louise Sandher-Jones MP, a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State within the Ministry of Defence, who took office in September 2025, succeeding Alistair Carns. She focuses on welfare, housing, and support for current service personnel and veterans, often engaging with military communities and advocating for improvements in areas like accommodation.

Key Responsibilities & Activities:

Accommodation Review: She recently launched a major review into Single Living Accommodation (SLA) to address issues like damp and mould, ensuring better standards for service personnel.

Veteran Support: The MP works on initiatives like the VALOUR blueprint and tackling veteran homelessness, meeting with regional leaders like the Mayor of Greater Manchester.

Engagement: As a Veteran herself, she actively visits military bases and events to understand the lived experiences of personnel and their families, emphasizing her commitment to their well-being.

Background: Louise Sandher-Jones was elected as the MP for North East Derbyshire in 2024. She is a former Army officer, giving her firsthand understanding of military life.

Armed Forces Bill: She said *"As a veteran, I was proud to be a part of the Defence team as we passed the Armed Forces Bill through its Second Reading.*

This is a hugely important Bill, preparing our Armed Forces for the challenges ahead through its measures to support new technology such as drones as well as improving how we can use the Reserves to give us that strategic resilience we need.

I'm particularly proud of the clauses to improve the Service Justice System, putting victims at the heart and giving Service Police the tools they need to deliver accountability.

Crucially we are also establishing a new Defence Housing Service. We've worked hard to put billions extra into improving the houses our service personnel live in and while I'm pleased with the progress we've made, this new Service will make sure we deliver.

I'm proud that we in this government have taken this big step with this Bill to carry on our work of improving the lives of soldiers and strengthening the Armed Forces we are rightly all so proud of!"

The Veteran Friendly GP Scheme

1. What is the Veteran Friendly GP Practice Scheme?

The Veteran Friendly GP Practice Accreditation, delivered by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and supported by NHS England, is a voluntary programme that helps GP practices identify, understand, and better support patients who have served in the UK Armed Forces.

Accredited practices commit to:

- Asking new patients if they have served and accurately coding veteran status.
- Appointing a clinical lead who completes RCGP veteran-specific training.
- Staying up to date with veteran healthcare pathways and Armed Forces Covenant duties.

The Royal British Legion supports the adoption of the scheme, having seen the effective benefits for the Armed Forces community at GP practices that have adopted it so far.

2. Why Is the scheme important?

- Veterans have unique health needs
- Veterans are more likely to experience:

Long-term physical conditions, musculoskeletal injuries, and service-related health issues.
Mental health challenges such as PTSD, mood disorders, adjustment disorders, and substance-related issues.

- Many GPs don't know who their veteran patients are
- Without proper identification, opportunities for specialist referrals or service-related clinical insight can be missed. Accreditation ensures veterans are consistently recognised.
- Better access to specialist veteran NHS services
- Accredited practices can more easily refer veterans to services including:

Op COURAGE – Mental Health and Wellbeing Service
Op RESTORE – Physical Health and Rehabilitation Service

- Supports legal and policy obligations
- Under the Armed Forces Act 2021, GP practices must show "Due Regard" for the Armed Forces community. Accreditation provides a straightforward way to demonstrate compliance.
- The scheme is widely adopted
- As of early 2025, 65.9% of GP practices in England are already accredited, making it a well-established national standard.

3. How you can help a GP practice join

A. Start a conversation

When engaging with a Practice Manager or GP Partner, emphasise that accreditation is:

- Free and simple
- Supported by RCGP and NHS England
- A practical way to improve care for an often overlooked patient group

B. Reinforce the benefits to the practice

Accreditation provides:

- Better understanding of patient backgrounds
- Improved accuracy of records
- Compliance with the Armed Forces Covenant
- Faster and more appropriate referrals

TIME FOR A LAUGH

A wife was angry because her husband forgot their wedding anniversary. She shouted, “Tomorrow morning I want something in the driveway that goes from 0 to 100 in 5 seconds!”

The ne xt morning, she found a small box outside. She opened it and found a bathroom scale.
The hospital reports say her husband is recovering well.

A burglar breaks into a house at night. He hears a soft voice say, “Jesus is watching you!”. The burglar freezes. He turns off his flashlight. Again, he hears “Jesus is watching you!” Terrified, he turns the light back on, and sees a parrot in a cage. He asks, “Did you say that?” The parrot replies “Yes”. The burglar sighs in relief and asks, “What’s your name?” The parrot says “Abraham.” The burglar laughs “Who names a Parrot Abraham?” The parrot answers “The same people who named the Rottweiler ‘Jesus’!”

Husband: “For the past 30 years, all you’ve done is find fault in everything I say” **Wife:** “31 years..”

I got myself a seniors’ GPS. Not only does it tell me how to get to my destination, it tells me why I wanted to go there!

My husband is blaming me for ruining his Birthday. That’s ridiculous, I didn’t even know it was his Birthday!

To err is human. To blame it on someone else shows management potential.

FEMALE VETERANS’ TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

In November 2025, the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP) launched its essential Female Veterans Toolkit to help organisations improve support for the UK’s 272,000 female veterans.

Funded by Leading National Partners

The FVPT is supported by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT), NHS England, the Office for Veterans’ Affairs and the Veterans Foundation, in collaboration with the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster and the Women’s Royal Army Corps Association.

The Toolkit is a practical resource that helps organisations and professionals better understand and support female veterans in the UK. It’s built from research and co-designed with women who have served and the organisations that work alongside them.

The following learning opportunities will also be available:

· Lunch & learns
· Tailored online sessions for organisations
· Face-to-face workshops
· Self-guided e-learning

Organisations from any sector who support female veterans are encouraged to consider booking training with the FVTP. Registration of interest can be made by emailing the FVTP Project Officer, Ria Luke: rialuke@fvtp.org.uk

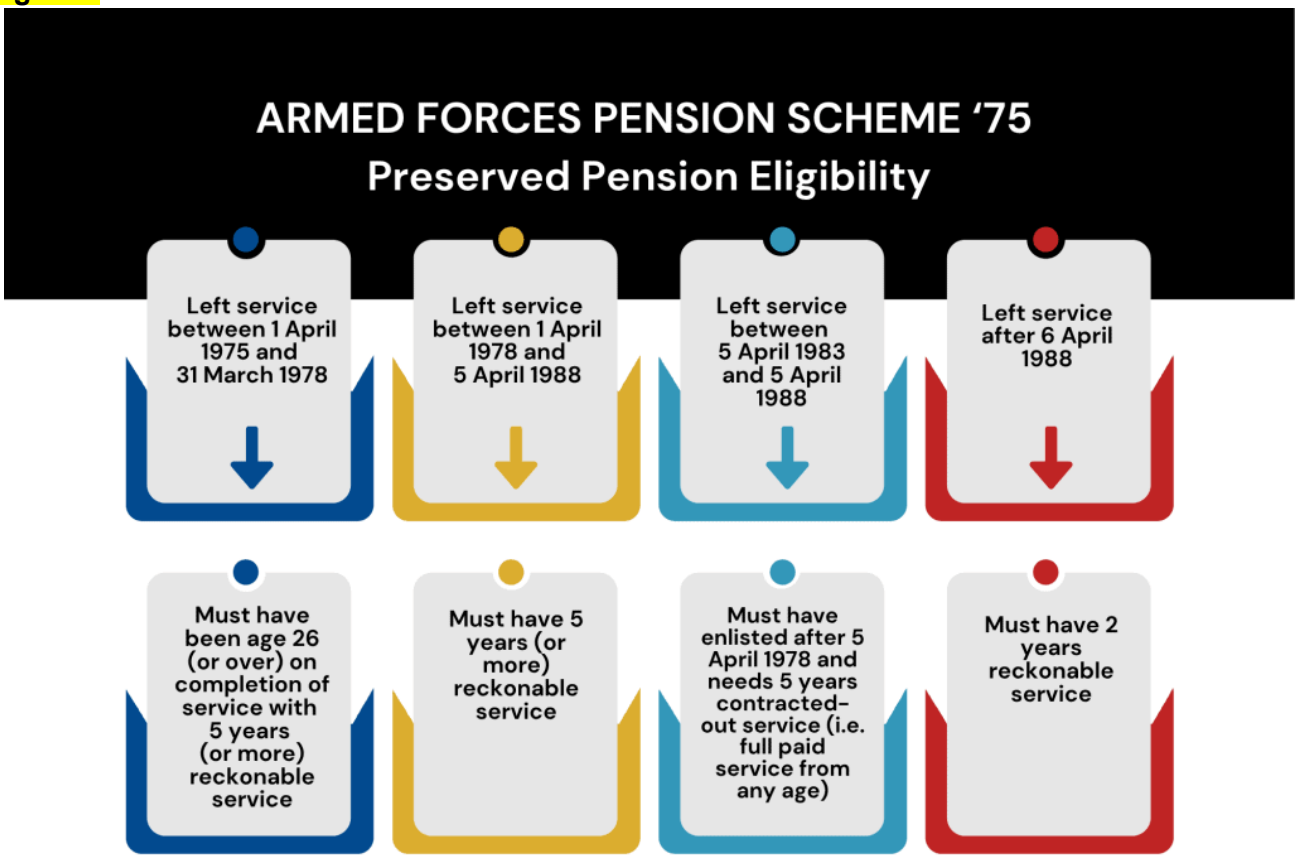
The Forces Pension Society (FPS) and FVTP

The Forces Pension Society is excited to be supporting the FVTP in delivering focused, empowering pension education tailored specifically for female veterans. By combining their expertise with the programme’s deep understanding of women’s lived experience in the Armed Forces, they aim to give female veterans the clarity, confidence and knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their financial future. The FPS said, “Together, we’re helping ensure that every woman who has served can fully access – and fully understand—the pension benefits she deserves.” More to follow…

VETERANS' UNCLAIMED ARMED FORCES PENSIONS CAMPAIGN

Every year some **2,000** deferred Armed Forces pensions go unclaimed and the sums involved can be significant.

The latest MoD report states more than 15,000 pension benefits that remain unclaimed, down from 17,100 in 2023. This is progress but more needs to be done which is why the **Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund** is supporting the Unclaimed Pensions campaign. They aim to raise awareness and signpost eligible Veterans to unite them with their pension benefits. **Are you eligible?**



Yes? Next steps.

The pension is **NOT** paid automatically – Veterans must apply to Veterans UK using **AFPS Form 8** or call **0800 085 3600** for further information.

If you were married to a Veteran who met the eligibility criteria above and they have sadly passed away, you may be entitled to dependant's benefits. If this applies to you, follow the same steps.

How you can help support the campaign

Donate. Every gift takes the **Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund** a step closer to linking up Veterans with the pensions owed to them. They couldn't do it without our support.

Share their campaign. Please share this page widely across your networks, and with anyone connected to the Armed Forces to maximize its impact. They may be entitled and totally unaware!

Unclaimed Pensions and the Armed Forces Covenant

The Government has indicated its strong support for the Armed Forces Covenant. In that spirit, **Forces Pension Society Charitable Fund** invite it to do two things: update the rules so that all Veterans, current and future are notified of their pension entitlement, and to increase their efforts to identify those who have not claimed their pension to date and endeavour to contact them.