

New normal but we are still here

LOCKDOWN is impacting on us all but VIC will always be there in time of need.

We have adapted our way of working including holding Zoom meetings, with members participating via the internet in their own homes.

Although we are unable to open the VIC Centre to the

general public, it is manned daily to offer support on the phone.

Our crew van, along with veteran volunteers, has been assisting Positive Start to distribute food across Rossendale.

Until lockdown the charity provided a weekly Food Group in Rawtenstall.

VIC Operations Manager Bob Elliott

said: "Our Outreach Workers have been keeping in contact with veterans and we also launched virtual art classes including our popular painting in the style of Bob Ross and crafting sessions.

"We delivered a wheelchair to a veteran in Heywood and veteran Brian McEvoy has been

helping out in his area of Hyndburn by refurbishing benches for the community."

Volunteer with Positive Start Jo Shakeel said: "It is great to see so many local groups and organisations working together; VIC has been great and Bob has been fantastic.

"We have seen a dramatic increase in

demand, due to self isolation, or financial difficulties, and we are expecting more and more each week."

She said surplus food had also been redistributed to Trinity Baptist Church and the RAFT Foundation.

● **More information on these and more VIC activities in our May newsletter.**



Main contact 01706 833180

email amandawaltonwalton@vic.org.uk
bobelliott@vic.org.uk amythompson@vic.org.uk
or raysharkey@vic.org.uk

Outreach workers are working from home but still available:

call Steve Butterworth 07741902188
email stevebutterworth@vic.org.uk
call Bev Fowler 07741902343
email beverleyfowler@vic.org.uk
call Gill Hughes 07741902411
email gillhughes@vic.org.uk

This is a special edition of VIC News and features the VE Day stories and recollections of veterans.

Some were serving when the ceasefire was announced, others were children on May 8 1945, one was taking his first breath.

Sadly the many VE Day 75 commemorations that were planned have had to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic that has had a devastating effect on people of all ages.

Stay safe.

VE Day 75 Special Issue



VE Day? Messages to send

WHILE others were celebrating the ceasefire across Europe, for Royal Signals Soldier Bernard Munton it was business as usual.

Bernard, 96, from Milnrow, was based in Persia, now known as Iran, and the fighting in other parts of the world was still continuing. It was not until August 14

1945 that VJ Day was declared.

He said: "I joined at 18, I was called up. I received my letter and went along to Squires Gate in Blackpool for basic training. The Signals was top notch.

"From there I went to London to a girls' school in Putney where I trained in Morse Code.

"We never knew what the messages meant that we were sending out, they were all code in code.

"I went abroad in 1943 and I started off in South Africa, then served in India, Iraq, Persia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt."

On May 8 1945, Bernard said: "The Churchill announcement in the House of Commons came through to us and everybody thought

'about time' and we will be going home.

"In Persia there were 12 members of the British Corps of Signals, along with 2,000 British other ranks mostly Indian soldiers.

"The Indian regiment covered the North of Persia and to travel from north to south involved crossing two mountain ranges and three deserts.

"I was a wireless operator and I was responsible for sending messages that would go around the world to Dehli, Baghdad in Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and 'Troopers' – the War Office in London."

He described living in Persia as a 'horrible place' with little in the way of sanitation and they lived in tents through extreme heat in summer and thick snow



in winter

Bernard was one of 10 siblings and all five brothers joined up as did two of his

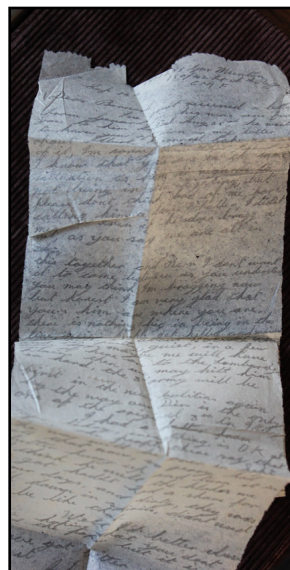
brothers'-in-law.

He said: "I just wonder what my parents thought at the time; it must have been awful for them.

"While in Persia, I received a letter from one of my brothers who was serving in Italy and he had written it on a piece of toilet paper. When I got his letter I was so bothered that I wrapped up a parcel with paper, pens and shaving equipment and sent it out to him, but it came back to me. I found out he had been blown up in Italy and they never found him."

In March 1947, Bernard finally left the

army and he was married the following month to his sweetheart Gladys, whom he had been courting since enlisting. They were married for 72 years and she sadly passed away in June 2017.



Birthday celebrations for VE Day baby

WHILE most were celebrating the end of the war in Europe – Paul Worswick was taking his first breath.

Former Greater Manchester Ambulance Emergency Medical Technician Paul from, Bacup, was born in Manchester on May 8 1945 in the middle of a street party in Longsight.

His mother Dorothy, a typesetter, went into labour and the midwife was called. Paul was born in an upstairs

bedroom late in the afternoon while the party continued outside.

His middle name is Victor for Victory.

Paul, and wife Christine, had planned to spend his 75th birthday celebrating on the remote Scottish Orkney island of Papa Westray, however Christine has Parkinson's and so she has to be shielded during the coronavirus pandemic and as her carer he

too is not allowed out.

He said: "We do have a bottle of champagne at home ready and we will be raising a glass not just for my birthday, but to all those who fought for our freedom 75 years ago and to the NHS staff and my former colleagues who are keeping us safe today."

Paul hopes to be around to toast the centenary of VE Day and his own 100th.





Penpal became wife

VIC
VETERANS IN COMMUNITIES
Return. Belong. Prosper.



PLUMBER Jack Riley served five years as a mechanic in REME and was in Lübeck, north of Hamburg, in Germany when news came through that hostilities had ceased.

Jack, 96, from Haslingden, said: "We knew something was happening at the beginning of May and there were rumours going round.

"Then on May 5 we heard confirmation that the Generals were meeting in a railway carriage in Luneberg

Heath in central Germany, the same carriage they met in to sort reparations after the First World War.

"On May 8 the statutory cessation of hostilities had been decided and there was a booze up."

About 10 days later the division was notified that they would have to polish their boots, get their best uniform ready and shine up the trucks – a special visitor would be coming.

The division assembled at Lübeck Park, about half a mile away, and Montgomery

arrived to speak to the troops, however as there was not enough room in the Liberty trucks for Jack, he missed it.

He was called up in 1942 and completed basic training at Sheffield, went down south for basic mechanic training and was then sent to the REME engine works in Runcorn where he learnt how to repair vehicles in the field.

Jack was posted to Stranraer and spent around seven months in another REME workshop where he broke his leg.

While in hospital in Turnberry, in the next bed was a soldier from Colne who was being treated for appendicitis. He suggested Jack become penpals with one of his daughters while he was posted abroad – and he met Brenda.

From Scotland, Jack was sent to Lewis and then he was on the last wave of boats to land on the Normandy



Beaches on D-Day June 6 1944.

He said: "After the first fortnight we were moving around two to three miles everyday behind the infantry with a mobile workshop so we could repair the vehicles from the front line.

"One of the worst jobs we had to do was to pull a Bren Carrier – a little three-man tank – that a truck had forced into a ditch. We had to go into the mud to try to fasten a hook onto the tank. It was messy."

They went through France, Belgium and Holland but because winter had set in they couldn't cross the Rhine.

Eventually better weather meant they could cross the Rhine and from March he was based at Lübeck, billeted in a small hotel.

Lübeck was an 'open

city' and was not allowed to make armaments and no army, apart from the British occupied forces, was ever to be based there.

Jack said: "There was supposed to be no fraternity between the Germans and the British, but I became friends with a former German officer and his family, he had lost an eye in combat and had been relieved of duty.

"We continued to correspond for nearly 17 years after the war was over."

From Lübeck he was posted to Hanover before he was demobbed.

He met his penpal Brenda for the first time while on leave and in November 1948, a year after he was demobbed, they married and were together for nearly 67 years until she passed away in 2015.



Birds heard singing

BEING in the Signals, despatch rider Lewis Banham was in one of the first brigades to be told that the war was over.

The 97-year-old from Weir served in 44 Brigade of the 15th Scottish Division and was in Schwerian on the River Elbe in Germany when VE Day was declared in a house the British army had occupied.

He said: "When cease-fire came the guns went silent and I could hear all the birds chirping; I had not heard them for so long because of the gunfire. It was a wonderful sound to me.

"It felt grand knowing that I could go out on my motorbike without fear of possibly being hit by a bullet. There was relief among the

soldiers and we had a celebration.

"I can still see the house. We had billeted in a semi with a little garden, it had three bedrooms and there were four of us living there – three upstairs and one downstairs, that was me and I slept on a window seat.

"I had taken the cushions off the sofa to make a bed and the lady who used to live in the house came back and removed them. When I told her what I needed them for she replaced them and left me six eggs, I guess as a peace offering."

Lewis arrived in Europe in June 1944 in the fifth wave of troops to land on the Normandy Beaches on D-Day.

From there, he travelled throughout

Europe delivering messages to the front line on his trusty BSM20 motorbike, the same bike he was still riding nearly a year later when the guns fell silent.

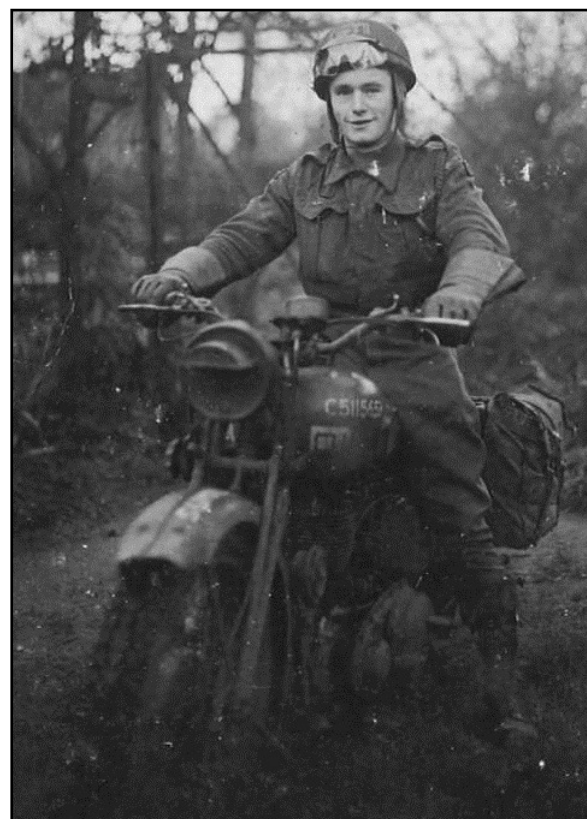
Shortly after VE Day, Lewis moved to Baad Segeburg where again the troops took over houses from residents and he recalled how they allowed the owners back to tend their gardens and look after the vegetables.

He said: "I remember the lady of the house had a son Klaus, he was about six, and I would give him chocolate and he was delighted.

"His mum would look after the garden and she also took away my washing and brought it back clean and ironed. Not every body's in the house – just mine."

After a month's leave in England, he was then posted to Austria, when he was delivering despatches by train through the Russian area.

His motorbike had been swapped for a jeep and latterly a Dodge truck. Lewis



always liked the bike but the 4-wheel-drive of the jeep meant it could go through any mud with ease.

After contracting jaundice, he spent 13 weeks in a Vienna hospital only being released days before being demobbed in November 1946.

Arriving back in Bacup, by train, Lewis got on the bus to the centre then bumped into

his father who helped him carry his kit bag to his home on Tong Lane where Bessie was waiting to greet him. They had married in March three weeks before Lewis was called up on April 16 1942.

Lewis has since been honoured with the Legion d'honneur, the highest military medal of France, and the Dutch Liberation medal.





Victory Parade



VETERAN Jack Carter was brought up in a rural area near Chesterfield and remembers the Victory Parade that followed VE Day.

Jack, 83, who recently moved to Middleton three years ago with his wife Molly to be near his grandchildren, said: "The Home Guard were

in the parade, around 20 of them and our neighbour was at the front, but he was deaf and so never heard the command to stop and just kept on walking.

"Members of the fire service were in the procession, the air raid wardens and the Scouts and they all gathered in a park where a celebration was held.



"I remember growing up they built a brick and concrete air raid shelter and they closed down the cinema and put some of the seats inside.

"As children we got excited if we heard airplanes overhead and we used to go chasing round. We all coveted finding a pilot's helmet but we never did.

"We would run around with our arms outstretched and using pegs as propellers and pretend to be planes.

"When the sirens would go our mum and dad was anxious for us and more often than not we would put a rug made of strips of wool down the cellar steps and stay in there."

He described how the Home Guard would put posts up in the fields just in case any German soldiers tried to parachute into their area.

Jack joined the Royal Marines in 1954 and after training in the South of England and Scotland, he was first posted abroad to Cyprus, then Malta and Suez, a posting that deeply affected him.

He said: "In Suez 11 Royal

Marines died and 60 were wounded in action. It stuck with me for a long time. I am a pacifist; more than a pacifist."

As one of five, all four brothers served, one in the Sherwood Foresters Infantry Regiment, one in the RAF and another in the Royal Engineers.

Jack said: "I remember the recruitment poster saying we would 'get to see the world'. I did seven years in the Royal Marines and a further five on reserve, but only ever training I was not called up.

"Now, looking back, we wouldn't have done it. We didn't realise what we were doing and didn't give enough thought for our mum and dad.

"They were all proud of us, but now I can see the effect it must have had on them having a family of my own."

As well as attending The Sandbag Café, Jack is also a member of the Royal Marines' Association, The Royal British Legion and the Blind Veterans' Association.

Evacuee returns home for celebrations

HAVING been evacuated for most of the Second World War in Colne, Manchester-born Gordon Aaron was back in Ardwick when war was finally over.

Gordon, 84, who lives in Milnrow, said: "I was four when I was evacuated and I stayed at several different houses. The last person I lived with was lovely lady, I attended the Cubs, she took me to church every week and we used to put on a concert at Christmas.

"My brother Gerald,



who was nine years older than me and was serving with the Kings Own Royal Borders, came for me and took me back home to Wootton Street.

"I remember being at my grandmother's house and she had wooden shutters on the inside of the windows and we would be hiding under the table as we

heard the V2 rockets coming down.

"The windows were all shattered with the vibration and we were only a mile from Piccadilly which was heavily bombed.

"I was about 10 and at home when Victory in Europe was declared. The whole family was sitting round listening to the radio. Everyone was screaming, laughing and hugging each other. It was such a big relief.

"Everyone in the street brought their tables and chairs out of their homes and we made red, white and blue bunting out of

anything that we could find. Some of it was material and we also made paper chains.

"People brought their pianos out of their houses and they were playing them while we danced up and down the cobbled street.

"We lived in a poor area so there was very little food on the tables because it was still being rationed, but everybody was over the moon."

Gordon completed his National Service with the Border Regiment in his 20s and now inspires others as he runs half marathons.



ROSSENDALE

Activities are held at the VIC Centre, Bury Road, Haslingden, BB4 5PL, unless otherwise stated.

Outreach Service

MONDAY-FRIDAY

9am-4.30pm

For a home appointment call 01706 833180

MONDAY

Crafty Chatters

10am-12 noon

WEDNESDAY

Allotment and Veterans In Production

Help on the allotment in Holcombe Road, Helmshore, or manufacture wooden items at the centre. Contact 01706 833180.

Art Class

2pm-4pm

Jubilee Court, Jubilee Road, Haslingden, BB4 4DD.

THURSDAY

Woodworking Course

10am-3pm

THURSDAY

Computer and IT help drop-in

11am-3pm

VIC Choir (weekly)

6.30-8.30pm

FRIDAY

Art Group and drop-in

10am-3.30pm

SECOND SATURDAY

Rossendale Armed Forces and Veterans' Breakfast Club

10am-12.30pm

The Link Cafe, Haslingden Community Link, Bury Road, Haslingden BB4 5PG

EVERY MONTH

Painting in the Style of Bob Ross art classes

Contact Darren 01706 833180.

Walking Group, Social Outings and Outdoor Activities

These are held every

THURSDAY. Visit the Events section on our VIC Facebook page or the VIC website and follow the link to Projects and Activities

9.30am-11.30pm

Ebenezer's Coffee Shop, The Old Chapel,

Ebenezer's Terrace, Billington, BB7 9NN.

BURNLEY AND PENDLE

Outreach Service

TUESDAY - alternate weeks

Breakfast Club at Burnley FC in the Community Cafe, Charter Walk.

9am-11am

Contact 01706 833180 for dates of outreach at Burnley FC in the Community, the Pendle Armed Forces Support Group, Holmefield Mill, Gisburn Road, Barrowford, at Morrisons in Nelson and Asda in Colne.

HEYWOOD, MIDDLETON AND ROCHDALE

The Sandbag Cafe and drop in

TUESDAY

10am-noon

Sandon House, Taylor Street, Heywood OL10 1EF.

VIC Outreach

TUESDAY

12.30pm-2.30pm

Middleton Gardens, M24 1AB

The Mess Tin - cafe and drop in

1pm-2.30pm

The Lighthouse Project, Middleton Shopping Centre, M24 1AB.

THURSDAY

9am-10.30am Rochdale Breakfast Club Rochdale Town Hall Bistro OL16 1AB.

10.30am-noon

VIC Outreach

1 Riverside, Rochdale OL16 1UB.

HYNDBURN

Outreach Service and Art Group

TUESDAY

10am-3pm

VIC Shop, Accrington Arndale Centre, BB5 1PL.

FRIDAY

Outreach Service

10.30am-3pm

Want to help?

To donate to support the work of VIC please visit our website and click on the secure

Virgin Money Giving link

www.veteransincommunities.org/donate.html

VIC – 01706 833180

Chief Executive Amanda Walton

amandawalton@vic.org.uk

Operations Manager Bob Elliott

bobelliott@vic.org.uk

07961 554 006

Admin Officer Amy Thompson

amythompson@vic.org.uk

Outreach Worker Steve Butterworth

stevebutterworth@vic.org.uk

07741902188

Project Worker Bev Fowler

beverleyfowler@vic.org.uk

07741 902 343

Project Worker Ray Sharkey

raysharkey@vic.org.uk

Transformational Coach Gill Hughes

gillhughes@vic.org.uk

07741 902 411

Volunteer Support Worker Mel Fitzgerald

melfitzgerald@vic.org.uk

Arts and Crafts Co-ordinator Darren Horsnell

darrenhorsnell@vic.org.uk

Outdoor Activities Co-ordinator Ivy Limbrick

ivylimbrick@vic.org.uk

Sessional Worker Bernard Tighe

bernardtighe@vic.org.uk

VIC Choir Bookings Barry Hyde

barryhyde@vic.org.uk

Contacts

Combat Stress Helpline

0800 138 1619

NHS Military Veterans Psychological

Therapies Service (NW)

0300 323 0707

The Royal British Legion

0808 802 8080

7 days a week 8am-8pm

SSAFA

email Lancashire@ssafa.org.uk

01772 260 462

Rossendale Citizens' Advice

0300 456 2552

The Samaritans

01282 694929

Mon to Fri 9am-9pm

Freephone 116 123

Mental Health Helpline

0800 915 4640

Mon to Fri 7pm - 11pm Sat

& Sun 12 noon to 12 midnight

Royal Air Forces Association

0800 018 2361

Veterans UK Free Helpline

0808 1914 218

East Lancashire Single Point of Access

via GP or self-referral

01282 657116

Bolton Armed Forces Centre 4 Veterans

www.bafc4v.org

01204 776628

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