



SITREP

Saturday

June 26 2021

Issue#1

Welcome To the First Edition of SITREP

DR. GILL LE PAGE

Welcome to the first edition of SITREP, the quarterly newsletter for Veterans Community Network (VCN). A big thank you to everyone who has submitted their stories.

As this is the very first edition, I thought I'd write about how VCN came about. Like many ideas, the seeds for VCN were sewn several years ago as a result of a close family members struggles with service-related PTSD and alcoholism.



It took many years for them to acknowledge that their service in Northern Ireland in the mid 1980's had a profound impact on both them and close family members. What followed was a series of treatment appointments, failure to engage and 'case closed'. This showed a clear lack of understanding by the professionals involved in the treatment and care package. It wasn't a lack of motivation or willingness to change on the part of the family member. Simply put, although the services were there, they were inaccessible for them. Guilt, shame, not being listened to or understood about the issues they had, all acted as barriers to engagement.

Sadly, this is not a unique story by any means. Through my previous work, I was privileged enough to learn the value of peer mentor support (individuals with lived experience) in getting people into treatment and supporting them to stay there as well as providing support in other areas of need.

So the idea of training veterans as peer mentors to provide this valuable support and 'bridge' into treatment and support services was 'hatched'.

I was fortunate to meet MK and Bedford Armed Forces Covenant Project Manager, Johanna Hrycak (JJ) early in 2019 who 'got' the vision and shared the same passion as I had in supporting those who have served.

VCN took its first steps as a Community Group in November 2019 supported by a steering group made up of VRFM's (Veterans, Reservists & Family Members).

In November 2020 VCN became a registered charity covering Milton Keynes, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. Today, we are continuing to grow as a charity, having supported over 250 VRFM's, employ two part time staff members and trained 4 peer mentors so far, with another 6 now waiting to complete the training.

I would like to thank everyone who has been part of the VCN journey so far. It's you who has made it possible for local veterans to continue to support local veterans.

Dr Gill Le Page
Chair of Trustees & VCN Service Director
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Armed Forces Day Saturday 26th June 2021

ARMEDFORCESDAY.ORG.UK

Armed Forces Day takes place the last Saturday of each June, which this is year



Saturday 26th June 2021. This day is an incredible opportunity to show support to all the courageous men and women who make up the Armed Forces Community. These include, currently serving troops, the UK Armed Forces, Veterans, Reservists, Cadets, Families and Charities. The Armed Forces Day celebrations begin on Monday 21st June 2021, when the Armed Forces Day flag is raised on buildings and famous landmarks around the county.

Reserves Day takes place on Wednesday 23rd June 2021. Reservists give up their spare time to serve in the Reserve Forces, balancing their civilian life with a military career to ensure that should their country require them, they would be ready to serve as part of the military.

The Reserve Forces make up approximately one sixth of our Armed Forces personnel and as such are integral to protecting the nation's security at home and overseas, particularly providing capability in specialist areas such as medical and cyber

Reservists are currently supporting operations worldwide.

However, the contribution they make to our Armed Forces often goes unrecognised. As such an annual Reserves Day was created to highlight and recognise the valuable contribution Reservists make to our Armed Forces.

Reservists are everywhere, but you might not know it. So on Reserves Day, our Reservists wear their uniform in their civilian life, so keep an eye out for them this year.

Physical and virtual events are being held across the country to mark this year's Armed Forces Day. Find your local event - <https://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/find-events/> Events may be affected by COVID-19. Please contact the individual event organisers, using the contact details provided, for further information on specific events. For further information, please click the link below:

<https://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/about>

Save the Date! Saturday 24th July 2021

VCN GARDEN PARTY

Where: Ruskin Court, Newport Pagnell

Time: 14:00 – 17:00



In honour of our Armed Forces Community, VCN are pleased to announce that we are planning to host an outdoor garden party, with tea, coffee, cake and the chance to win some prizes in an auction on the grounds of Ruskin Court.

We would really appreciate some help from are any keen bakers out there if you would be kind enough to whip us up some delicious baked goods for the event?

Please kindly note that there will be a limited amount of availability due to COVID restrictions, ticket information will be released shortly. Keep an eye out on our social media for updates and further information.

We hope to see you there!

12 Years in the RAF

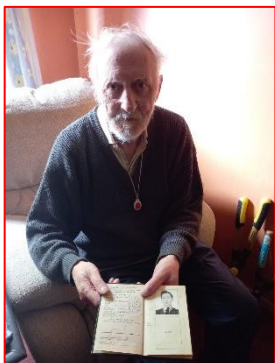
The Story of Francis O'Connell

TINA GRIFFITHS

Francis O'Connell was born in Kingston upon Thames and as a boy he always loved aeroplanes and wanted to join the RAF. Having joined as a boy entrant, he completed 18 months training at RAF Hereford and passed out in 1961.

Francis served in the RAF for 12 years. On completion of his training, his first posting was to RAF Marham, in Norfolk, where he spent 2 years working in the radio bays filling out paperwork for the black boxes.

He was then posted to RAF Khormaksar in Aden in April 1963 where he was responsible for guarding aircraft including the Beverly, the Hawker Hunter, FJ9's, Mark 6's and the Varsity aircraft (also known as The Flying Pig!)



Whilst stationed in Aden, one of the local volunteers, a Major, lobbed a grenade into a cinema. Thankfully he mistimed it, as the show was just finishing, and the audience had begun to get up and leave, so although many were injured, there were no fatalities.

In 1964, Francis was awarded the **Campaign Service Medal 1962** Radfan, South Arabia, for service on operations in the Radfan mountains 60 miles north of Aden.

When he returned to UK, Francis was posted to RAF Stafford, in the West Midlands, where he worked as a clerk. He was then posted to RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire where he worked in communications. He remembers Prince Charles visiting the camp whilst he was stationed there.



(Picture above: Francis photographed second row, second to the left).

Francis also spent time at Biggin Hill working in the Quarters Recruitment Programme.

During his time in the RAF, Francis played scrum half for an RAF rugby team, (he wasn't heavy enough for a forward!) and he was also a member of an RAF hockey team! Asked which he preferred, he said hockey!

Francis was discharged in February 1973 and when I last went to visit him, he had found his RAF Certificate of Service, which he proudly showed me.



Francis moved to Milton Keynes in 1982 and since he left the RAF has worked for the AA in an admin role, for the CAA based in London for 6 years, and before he retired, he worked as a postman here in Milton Keynes for 13 years. He has a black cat called Layla and is an avid reader and his favourite author is Dan Brown.

Would you like your story to be featured in our next Issue? Please submit your entries to emilieatvcn@gmail.com

Virtual Tea & Banter Every Tuesday & Thursday Afternoon

Feeling lonely? In need of some social interaction? Want to meet new people?



VCN hold two weekly "Virtual Tea & Banter" sessions, via Zoom, every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon offering the opportunity to meet and chat to new people and make new friends.

Our sessions are very informal, and our activities include talks on various subjects (some by members of the group).

Recent topics have included:

- The War Graves in France
- Astrology
- Mental Health Awareness
- The hobby of Photography
- The National Caribbean Monument Charity
- The Guernsey Occupation

Our activities also include picture, music, and general quizzes, as well as games such as Catch Phrase, Tension and A-Z (name 26 items in a certain category, one for each letter of the alphabet!)

Why not join us for a bit of banter in the comfort of your own home?

Just use the links below to join in the fun.

Topic: VCN MK/Bedford **Tuesday** Virtual Tea & Banter (VTB) 14.00 hrs

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81761082058...>
Meeting ID: 817 6108 2058
Passcode: vcn

Topic: VCN MK/Bedford **Thursday** Virtual Tea & Banter (VTB) 14.30 hrs

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81893626385?pwd=R1FzZGdvN3FEVSt6T1RmQXErlzRRQT09>
Meeting ID: 818 9362 6385
Passcode: vcn

PATRICK'S STORY

Hi everyone, a few weeks ago I was sleeping in the woods in my tent (been in it for about 8 weeks and more than likely would still be there) how did I get myself into such a mess?



One, the private landlord I was renting off, would not let me sign on to get some help with money to pay rent, and I was asked to leave. And two, I had not been working because of the pandemic, I was also on a zero hours contract and didn't receive anything from the company I worked for.

So here I was in my tent thinking that nobody gives a sh*t, and then I thought to myself, I'm going to try and get some help. I phoned the Royal British Legion on the off chance they could help (but I wasn't banking on it, I had been knocked back some many times) they got on the case straight away, and then the Army Champion, which every Council has got involved, and then a brilliant lady from Milton Keynes Council got involved, JJ.

JJ is an ex forces (oh forgot to mention that this was on a Friday late afternoon on a bank holiday weekend) and she said that she would sort something out for that night, I thanked her and said that if it was only going to be for one night I'll stay where I was. I now knew that at least someone did give a sh*t and that someone knew my situation but she would not let it go and she kept on and on (in a good way) it was getting later and later but she still kept on.

By about 8PM that night my phone was getting low on battery power, I told her this but she said "Don't give up I am on the case", and then my phone died.

Next thing about 11PM, may have been later than that, I heard people shouting (and I thought sh*t people were going to do me some harm) I shouted back but then the shouting stopped and my phone started again.

The caller said she has had people out looking for me for 2 hours (all of these people are ex-service people) and could I go down to the main road for and find them, which I did and they were great, offering hot drinks and other things.

The woman who I was in contact with, JJ, had arranged (with the Council Forces Champion) for me to stay in a Travelodge until after the bank holiday weekend (great hot water, shower, bed and a roof over my head, be it only for a couple of days but great) and come the Tuesday JJ had already started things moving with the Council.

They put me up in another Travelodge for the next few days, and whilst I was there, the VCN had contacted The Bus Shelter people phoned me and said they had a place with them so I moved with them, and still the people from the Royal British Legion, the VCN and JJ at the council were still on the case.

This charity gave me a room and food every day and helped me to find some where to live (I know you are thinking this is too much to do) they find out what you (YOU) are entitled to and they do all the hard work to find you somewhere.

I (We) are lucky we served our country and now with the help and support of people like the Bus Shelter, Royal British legion, MK Council and the VCN ...and all of the ex-service people, I am now in my own place, and I was only in a tent about 8 weeks ago.

When you are getting low, and I mean low, and you think that no-one gives a sh*t you are wrong. The VCN, Royal British Legion, ex-service people do give a sh*t about me and all other ex-service people.

I'm not the type to ask for help, I try and sort myself out. I thought I was too proud to ask for help, but I am glad I swallowed my pride. People in the ex-service community will bend over backwards to give any help they can. So I am now in my own place moved in yesterday and it all started when I asked for help and the local ex-service people and the VCN and Royal British Legion did give a sh*t.

I would just like to say again thank you to all the people that had helped me get to this place in my life, but a really big thank you to the Royal British legion and ex-service people that helped and still are helping, but the person I want to thank most is JJ (ex-service) as without her help (and stubbornness) I would still be in my tent or even worse. Thank you all some much

VCN IS ON THE ROAD! Marine & Cargo

EMILIE LE PAGE

VCN are absolutely delighted to have had the opportunity to work with Marine & Cargo, who through an incredibly generous gesture, has included our logo on the side of one of their trailers.



Marine & Cargo already have trailers dedicated to the Armed Forces Covenant and The Veterans Gateway and have added the Veterans Community Network logo onto a third trailer to raise awareness for our cause.

We would like to thank the Marine & Cargo team for their kindness and generosity, and we hope to go down and visit them soon to see their handwork firsthand!



SHORT STORY Ice Cream Tank Desert

PETER H.

I left school at the age of 16 and started work as an apprentice chef at the (then) Hyde Park Hotel in Knightsbridge. During that time many of members of high society held their special occasions there, Debutants Balls, Masonic Lodges that had famous people as members, Royal Household Regiments held their annual dinner dances. Bah Mitzvas were often held there because it had a special Hebrew kitchen that had been blessed by the Beth Din.

I remember on one occasion that the Royal Tank Regiment held Their officers Mess Dinner Dance, Queen Elizabeth, as the Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment, was in attendance along with the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles, Princess Anne and Prince Andrew. I was working in the pastry department and the mess organisers had requested a scale Centurion Tank made in ice-cream, to achieve this task we worked in a deep freeze 20 minutes in the freezer and 30 minutes out for a month. On the night of the Mess Dinner Cliff Richard and the Shadows provided the entertainment and I was asked to deliver the ice-cream to the Royal table, it was mounted on a silver salver measuring 3 feet by 2 feet and was quite heavy. Halfway across the dining room the head waiter whispered to me "lift it up", I was carrying it at waist height so to carry out his order I had to turn my wrists and raise the dish to head height.

I was wearing fresh starched chef's whites which consisted of blue check trousers, a white jacket, stove pipe pleated white hat with an apron tied around my waist into which was tucked my scabbard of knives and a kitchen towel. As the apron was tied very tightly the jacket was unable to raise up with the lifting of my arms, the result was that the starched jacket ripped the stitching of the underarm sleeves exposing my hairy armpits to Her Majesty and the rest of the royal family, I placed the salver on the table just 4 feet away from Her Majesty, I bowed and walked backwards away from the table in utter embarrassment.

Garden Clearance Veterans Supporting Veterans

TINA GRIFFTHS



A morning well spent helping to clear one of our local Veteran's back garden. I can't thank James & Steve enough for offering to help me today, I really appreciate it. It was hard work, but the results speak for themselves.



Veterans Supporting Veterans



We Can Help

Visit our website www.vcn.org.uk to submit an enquiry form.

FOOD WORDSEARCH

S	A	M	A	E	R	B	B	E	N	A	A
T	N	F	C	E	O	M	R	I	Y	O	T
I	E	I	G	P	A	T	E	A	V	A	A
N	C	N	A	L	F	M	L	P	E	F	L
I	I	E	O	R	W	A	O	M	A	W	A
G	R	D	R	O	B	R	S	I	L	E	S
E	T	O	H	M	A	P	S	P	I	T	A
O	H	C	A	P	Z	A	G	H	O	S	M
L	I	J	O	U	B	R	A	C	U	H	A
S	O	R	B	E	T	A	K	L	L	O	R
P	K	E	S	A	C	I	L	E	G	N	A
E	G	N	A	M	C	N	A	L	B	E	T

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Angelica | 14. Pear |
| 2. Blancmange | 15. Pork |
| 3. Brains | 16. Rice |
| 4. Bream | 17. Roe |
| 5. Chow mein | 18. Roll |
| 6. Cod | 19. Sloe Gin |
| 7. Flan | 20. Sole |
| 8. Gazpacho | 21. Sorbet |
| 9. Ginger | 22. Spam |
| 10. Ice | 23. Stew |
| 11. Jambalaya | 24. Stock |
| 12. Lamb | 25. Taramasalata |
| 13. Meat | 26. Tea |

Vegan PBJ Brownies

BOSH Cookbook
EMILIE LE PAGE

Dietary requirements but still have an insatiable sweet tooth? Need some inspiration for a twist on a loved classic? These tried, tested and loved PBJ Brownies are delicious and incredibly easy to make.

Ingredients:

- > 300g plain flour
- > 460g light muscovado sugar
- > 160g cocoa powder
- > 1tsp baking powder
- > ½ tsp salt

- > 120g smooth peanut butter (thinner is better for this)
- > 220ml water
- > 220ml vegetable oil
- > 2 ½ tbsp vanilla extract
- > 50g dark chocolate
- > 120g raspberry jam
- > 80g raspberries
- > 2tbsp broken peanuts

What you'll need:

Preheat oven to 160°C | 20x30cm cake tin | Parchment paper | Food processor, electric beater or just a bowl, mixing spoon and some willpower!

Instructions:

1. Line the cake tin with the parchment paper, making sure there's a good overhang.
2. Add the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder and salt to the bowl and mix well to combine. Add 30g of peanut butter, the water, oil and vanilla and mix in well. Break dark chocolate into squares and add it to the mixture, final mix to blend in the chocolate.

3. Use a spatula or a spoon to empty bowl into the cake tin and smooth to the edges. Swirl in the remain peanut butter & raspberry jam on the top and decorate with fresh raspberries and peanuts.
4. Bake in the oven for 45 minutes until soft/wobbly in the middle. Leave to cool to room temperature and tuck in!



Goopy Peanut Butter Jelly Brownies - <https://www.bosh.tv/recipes/goopy-pbj-brownies>