Editor's letter

A warm welcome to this issue.

Background

In May we launched The At Ease Appeal to raise funds for our vital services and to transform how we deliver support to veterans (on page 12 we talk about our Appeal and what it aims to do). At the core of the Appeal is our longstanding mission to help veterans deal with their mental health problems so that they can feel at ease again.

In this issue we explore what it means to feel at ease and why it’s important for our mental health. Feeling at ease can mean something different to us all, but for me it’s about being mindful in my day-to-day life. This means I feel calmer, more balanced and in control overall. Life can feel quite hectic sometimes – it can be so valuable to take a step back each day to reflect on what’s going on.

On page 8 we talk about how we can use our senses to change how we feel. On page 16 Dr Barbara Mariposa busts the common myths that surround mindfulness. And on page 19 we take a look at some of the slang phrases used in the military.

I hope you can find something in this issue to help you feel a little bit more at ease.

Sally George
Editor
magazine@combatstress.org.uk

P.S To help us keep our printing costs down, you can sign up to receive a digital version of our magazine at combatstress.org.uk/magazine
Hold a breakfast for your nearest and dearest to help raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans. Invite friends, family or colleagues round for breakfast and a brew – simply ask them to make a donation towards the cost of the spread. Tuck into something continental, have a full English or scoff an egg banjo – a fried egg sandwich favoured by British troops.

We’d love it if you could hold your Egg Banjo Breakfast on World Mental Health Day (10 October 2019), but you can host yours whenever you like. Every penny raised will help us be there for veterans when they’re struggling to cope with mental health problems. Head to page 19 to find out where the name egg banjo came from!

Egg Banjo Breakfast

Bring Them Home

In April we launched our Bring Them Home campaign, which focused on the devastating impact that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can have on the lives of veterans. Central to our campaign was a film made by a team working for 4Creative, Channel 4’s in-house creative agency.

Wanting to create something for a charity that they’re passionate about, the team gave up their time to create the film for us for free – including the producer, director, sound operators, cameraman, runners and lighting technicians.

The film focuses on how PTSD can mean that veterans struggle to leave the battlefield behind. We are enormously grateful for their generosity and we’re extremely proud of the result. If you haven’t yet seen it, watch it at combatstress.org.uk/battlefield

Did you know?

The last issue of our magazine raised over £30,000. Thank you for your ongoing support!

Help us save lives

Without our help, lives can become desperate. We need the support of people like you to continue providing our vital mental health treatment for veterans. Donate today by calling 01372 587 151 or visiting combatstress.org.uk/donate

Dates for your diary

We have a busy season of events coming up – why not join us for one of the following:

- **06 NOV**
  - Armistice Lecture  
  - London

- **13 NOV**
  - Scotland Autumn Lecture  
  - Edinburgh

- **11 DEC**
  - Festival of Lessons and Carols  
  - London

For tickets or more information about these events, please contact events@combatstress.org.uk, visit combatstress.org.uk/events or call 01372 587 148.
Our centenary – Combat Stress

Our centenary
– Combat Stress

combatstress.org.uk

| 24-hour Helpline
0800 138 1619

We've partnered with reminiscence charity Age Exchange to train eight of our veterans in interview and film-making techniques so they can help us record the stories of 100 other veterans and their families. The project highlights the impact that trauma-related mental health problems can have on veterans and their loved ones, as well as the life-changing support we provide.

This was made possible by a significant grant of £98,300 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The interviews will be used to create a film that will tour UK museums later this year. Keep an eye on our website to find out where it’s screening.

Age Exchange Artistic Director David Savill (third from left) with one of the project’s film crews.

Help us mark our centenary by taking part in Do 100! It’s as simple as it sounds: do 100 of anything you choose to help raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans. You could swim 100 lengths, bake 100 cakes or plant 100 seeds. Do your activity with others or as an individual – it’s completely up to you how you get involved. Simply sign up online, do your 100 activities, take a photo or video and then tell us about it.

To find out more, visit combatstress.org.uk/do100

1919 – today – Combat Stress

National Trust exhibition

National Trust property Overbeck’s in Salcombe, Devon, is holding an exhibition throughout the year about the experiences of First World War soldiers and how they compare to the lives of today’s servicemen and women. Royal Navy and Army veterans receiving treatment from us helped to design the exhibition as part of their recovery.

For more information, click on the news section of our website or visit nationaltrust.org.uk/overbecks

Centenary raceday at Wincanton

On Sunday 27 October we’ll be marking our centenary with a special raceday at Wincanton Racecourse in Somerset. Join us for an action-packed day of racing, entertainment, food and drink to help raise vital funds for the work we do. A special thank you to the Jockey Club and Wincanton Racecourse for organising this event for us.

For more information, click on the news section of our website or visit thejockeyclub.co.uk/wincanton

This May Combat Stress turned 100. Here’s a look at some of the things we’re doing this year to mark our centenary...

Here’s a look at some of our big milestones since we were founded in 1919...

1919 – the first official meeting of our charity – then known as the Ex-Servicemen’s Welfare Society – was held on 12 May 1919.

HRH Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother became patron of our charity. After her death in 2002, HRH Prince Charles became our patron.

We bought Hollybush House, one of our treatment centres. The land came with a trout river, which veterans undergoing our treatment can still fish in to this day.

We launched our 24-hour Helpline and our world-leading PTSD Intensive Treatment Programme. Both remain vital sources of support to veterans with mental health problems.

Our Peer Support Service was launched. Peer Support groups give veterans an opportunity to share their service experiences and give support to other veterans in a safe and confidential environment.

Our research team was established. We carry out high-quality research to make sure we are delivering the best possible mental health services to veterans.

We launched our major fundraising appeal: The At Ease Appeal. This Appeal will help to fund our world-renowned treatment and transform how we deliver support to veterans.

The National Trust property Overbeck’s in Salcombe, Devon, is holding an exhibition throughout the year about the experiences of First World War soldiers and how they compare to the lives of today’s servicemen and women. Royal Navy and Army veterans receiving treatment from us helped to design the exhibition as part of their recovery.

For more information, click on the news section of our website or visit nationaltrust.org.uk/overbecks

Help us mark our centenary by taking part in Do 100! It’s as simple as it sounds: do 100 of anything you choose to help raise funds for our life-changing mental health treatment for veterans. You could swim 100 lengths, bake 100 cakes or plant 100 seeds. Do your activity with others or as an individual – it’s completely up to you how you get involved. Simply sign up online, do your 100 activities, take a photo or video and then tell us about it.

To find out more, visit combatstress.org.uk/do100

Combat Stress 100

We’ve partnered with reminiscence charity Age Exchange to train eight of our veterans in interview and film-making techniques so they can help us record the stories of 100 other veterans and their families. The project highlights the impact that trauma-related mental health problems can have on veterans and their loved ones, as well as the life-changing support we provide.

This was made possible by a significant grant of £98,300 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The interviews will be used to create a film that will tour UK museums later this year. Keep an eye on our website to find out where it’s screening.

Age Exchange Artistic Director David Savill (third from left) with one of the project’s film crews.

HRH The Queen Mother

HRH Prince Charles

1919

1934

1985

2011

2014

2017

2019

HRH Prince Charles at the launch of The At Ease Appeal.
In this magazine we are exploring the feeling of being at ease. When we are relaxed and comfortable, our minds and our bodies are at ease. We all do different things to help us feel at ease – whether it’s gardening, lifting weights or walking the dog. Putting time aside for these things as part of a balanced life is a good way of managing our stress.

AT EASE
MAKE SENSE

We’ve all heard of the five senses: sight, smell, sound, touch and taste. We use these to gather information about where we are and how we feel in the world.

But we also have two lesser-known, movement-related senses that can help to change our mood. Combat Stress Lead Occupational Therapist Jolandi du Preez shares how we can use these senses to help us feel more at ease.

Body sense

We all have what can be described as our body sense, which is located in our joints and muscles. This sense gives our brains vital information about where we are in the environment. An example of this sense is knowing how hard to push when opening a door or being able to balance on one leg. Activities that target this sense can help us feel grounded, organised, settled and calm. This is why activities like yoga and mowing the lawn can calm and relax us, while running will energise us and make us feel more awake.

Inner ear

This can be described as our sense of balance, and it changes whenever we move our heads. Again, there are ways we can target this sense to either invigorate or relax our minds. Going on a rollercoaster or doing a handstand will be energising and can make us feel more awake. But if you want to feel calmer, you can rock in a rocking chair or swim breaststroke.

Whatever works for you

Using our senses to change the way we feel isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach. We all respond to our environments in completely different ways, so what works for one person might not work for another. The most important thing is to take a moment to focus on what you’re feeling right now. Ask yourself what it is you need: if you’re feeling on edge, do you need to feel relaxed? If you’re feeling sluggish, do you need to feel energised? Responding to our needs in this way is a tool we can all use to take good care of our mental health.

Quick-wins

Find activities that you can use throughout the day as quick-wins for when you want to feel calmer – like taking deep breaths or squeezing a stress ball.

Using the senses in treatment

Last year Lloyd’s Patriotic Fund donated £31,300 towards the development of the Combat Stress sensory modulation programme, which is part of the occupational therapy that the charity offers. The programme teaches veterans sensory techniques that they can use to help manage their mental health in their day-to-day lives.

Thanks to this funding the charity has been able to provide sensory equipment like pottery wheels, weighted blankets and massage chairs at its treatment centres and in the community. It also meant the charity could develop sensory rooms at its centres and deliver training to 20 of its occupational therapists so that they can deliver the programme.

TAKE A MINUTE

Practicing yoga targets your body sense to help relax you and ease stress. Here are some exercises you could take a minute to try at home.

Half-bend

Put your hands against a wall or on the back of a chair. Walk your feet back and place them hip-distance apart. Bend forward so that your back is parallel to the floor, keeping your head and neck in line with your spine.

Knee to chest

Lie down with both legs straight. Bend your right knee, placing both hands over the shin. Take a deep breath in. Then, as you breathe out, bring your knee closer to your chest. Repeat with your left leg.

Relaxation pose

Lie down flat on a comfortable surface and put a cushion under your head to support your neck. Close your eyes and relax your face. Let the full weight of your body rest against the floor. Breathe slowly and deeply.

If it’s been a while since you’ve exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it’s a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
One hundred years ago the public attitude towards mental health was severely lacking in awareness and understanding. Servicemen returning from the First World War with shellshock (what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD) would either be confined in a mental war hospital or have to suffer in silence at home.

Thankfully, a lot has changed since then. Along with the NHS and other organisations, Combat Stress offers a range of services for veterans who are struggling to cope. The world is shaking off the shame that was once attached to mental health. That stigma has reduced considerably and nowadays veterans are more prepared to seek the help they need and speak out about their personal experiences. Their voices are being heard and their stories are helping to raise awareness of the mental health problems that can arise as a result of traumatic experiences during military service.

The persistent involvement of our Armed Forces in some very demanding military operations over the past 15 years has attracted a lot of media attention on mental health in the military. We are still hearing tragic stories of Iraq and Afghan veteran's who have taken their lives because of mental health problems. These stories remind us that the aftermath of these conflicts is a very real hazard for some veterans. We still need greater political and public awareness of the impact that military combat can have on mental health.

In 2013 we set up our Combat Stress research department to gain a deeper understanding of the veteran community and evaluate the outcomes of our treatment. Knowing the risks and factors that can make a former serviceman or woman vulnerable to mental health problems enables us to identify the services that make the greatest difference. It also helps us ensure we are doing the best we possibly can with the resources we have.

Soldiers are trained to 'crack on' in the face of adversity... not so helpful for them personally when they need to step back."

Fortunately the majority of those leaving the Armed Forces go on to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives and careers, and make powerful contributions to the community. Yet for some veterans it’s a struggle to leave the battlefield behind. Of course, it’s this group of veterans we seek to know best.

We know that situations in early life can have a bearing on mental health later on. If a serviceman or woman has had difficult life experiences before joining the forces, they are more likely to develop mental health problems during or after their service.

We also understand how military culture can make a person a great soldier but a difficult patient. Our soldiers are trained to ‘crack on’ in the face of adversity – which is very helpful for the Army during operations but not so helpful for them personally when they need to step back, take stock and talk about the problems they’re having later on. This can make veterans reluctant to seek the help they need or to talk about their feelings.

Very often veterans seek our help too late, after they have kept everything hidden for such a long time that their mental health problems have become very severe and complex. It is not unusual for them to have more than one mental health problem, and they may well have relied for far too long on damaging coping mechanisms such as alcohol or drugs.

These veterans make up a unique population that has very specific needs. We know that for this group of veterans, our specialist clinical treatment can restore their prospects of leading the fulfilling and rewarding lives they so richly deserve, having served the nation.

The mental health challenges faced by some veterans today are no different from those faced by veterans of the Great War when our charity was formed. The significant progress in our leading clinical capability coupled with lower stigma in modern society and veterans’ greater inclination to seek help means that Combat Stress can now make a far greater contribution to veterans’ wellbeing than was possible 100 years ago.

The strides we’ve made continue to influence the landscape of veterans’ mental health. This is no better illustrated than in the part we played in encouraging the NHS to deliver dedicated veterans’ services such as the Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) and the Complex Treatment Service (CTS). That is a big change of which we can be very proud, and it confers on us an ongoing responsibility to provide our services and change as many veteran’s lives as possible.”

General Sir Peter Wall, President of Combat Stress and former head of the British Army, talks about what’s changed in the field of military mental health.
Being at ease is so important for your body and mind, but for some veterans this just isn’t possible after military service due to their experiences. At Combat Stress, our mission is to help those former servicemen and women who struggle to leave the battlefield behind feel at ease again.

Earlier this year we launched an exciting new campaign – The At Ease Appeal: to help more veterans be themselves again. This fundraising appeal will help us to continue providing crucial services such as our renowned post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) residential treatment programme, but also enable us to transform our services to introduce new treatment options so that we can meet the needs of veterans today and in the years to come.

Outpatient PTSD therapy: we want to help those struggling to balance the pressures of their everyday lives with the need to get help with their PTSD by offering a more flexible form of intensive psychological therapy. So, we’ve taken our highly successful residential programme and created flexible outpatient treatment. Delivering treatment in this accessible format will enable more veterans to get the help they desperately need.

Peer Support Service expansion: led by veterans, this service helps former servicemen and women feel supported, safe and understood in a trusted environment. This is so crucial in encouraging them to engage with us and benefit fully from our services. We want to expand this service across the UK.

Video call therapy: by introducing video call therapy we can make it easier for veterans to access help. In 2017 we ran a pilot study to deliver treatment for PTSD using software like Skype to complement our other services. Our findings showed that in most cases, video call therapy was just as effective as face-to-face therapies. We now want to expand this treatment to help us reach many more veterans.
The At Ease Appeal — who will it help?

Our Appeal will enable more veterans to get the help they need from us. Here are three veterans who’ve already benefited from our new forms of treatment and support.

Scott
Army veteran Scott served for over 25 years and took part in every major conflict during that time. After seeking help for PTSD, he was offered the chance to take part in our pilot study for video call therapy.

“Normally, I’d have to drive an hour and a half for therapy and take a day off work. It was so much better being able to do it over Skype. I just arranged the appointments over lunch time. I was working near to home, so I’d pop back for the appointment and then return to work afterwards. Video call therapy really fitted into my life.”

Aeran
Aeran joined the Army when he was 17. After being deeply affected by his second tour to Iraq, Aeran turned to alcohol and drugs to cope. As a result, he was discharged from the Army in 2008 and his mental health issues made civilian life difficult. Treatment from us for PTSD changed everything for Aeran, and he’s since undergone training to become one of our Peer Support group volunteers.

“Combat Stress has completely turned my life around. I’ve gone from a place of having no hope and no purpose to having fire in my belly again.”

Davina
Davina joined the Army Air Corps aged 23. She served for four and half years as a regular and a further two and a half as a reserve. After leaving the Services she found life hard on civvy street and was eventually referred to Combat Stress. Diagnosed with PTSD she wanted to get help, but needed to balance this with her working life.

“After my tour in Bosnia I felt like I had turned to stone inside. I was frightened of my own actions and felt like I was going insane. I wanted to get help, but I didn’t want anyone at work to know. I wanted life to carry on as normal, rather than taking six weeks out. Luckily I was able to do one therapy session a week on my day off.”

How you can help

£87
£87 could fund a one-to-one session for trauma-focused therapy in the community (part of our outpatient PTSD treatment programme).

£19
£19 could pay for one veteran to attend a Peer Support group meeting.

£58
£58 could pay for one video call therapy session for a veteran so that they can access support in their own home at a time to suit them.

Support the appeal

By supporting The At Ease Appeal you will help us take an urgent step forward in veteran mental health treatment – visit combatstress.org.uk/AtEaseAppeal to find out more or to make a donation.
Mindfulness

THE MYTHS

At Combat Stress we’re strong believers in the benefits of mindfulness on mental wellbeing. Yet as mindfulness grows in popularity, so do the number of myths that surround it.

Dr Barbara Mariposa is a medical doctor, public speaker and writer with a background in psychiatry and public health. Having always had an interest in the connection between mind, body and emotion, Dr Barbara has been using forms of meditation to improve her own mental health since the 1980s. We asked Dr Barbara to bust some of the more common mindfulness myths that could put people off giving it a try…

1. Mindfulness is complicated
   It’s not. Mindfulness is purely about being aware of the present moment and feeling connected, grounded and in touch with it. We find these moments many times in our lives by listening to music, doing something creative, or being with people we love.

2. Mindfulness fixes everything
   It doesn’t. You’ll feel clearer in your head, so you’ll be able to cope better with life’s challenges. But it’s not something that magically makes life’s ups and downs disappear.

3. Mindfulness is for everyone
   It’s not. Some people find it difficult to sit still and the pressure to do so can be counterproductive, making them feel like failures. Some people just don’t take to it and that’s fine.

4. Mindfulness is a quick fix
   It’s not. It takes self-discipline, perseverance and patience. It has enormous benefits like helping you be more focused, feel calmer and more balanced, but it takes regular practice over a period of time to see these benefits.

5. Mindfulness is hippie nonsense
   Not true. Scientific research shows that the brain changes shape according to how it’s used. Mindfulness appears to exercise certain areas of the brain in ways that alter its shape and functioning, which can improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

6. Mindfulness is therapy
   Definitely not. However, it is used in some treatment programmes as a technique to help people manage their mental health better.

7. Mindfulness makes you passive
   Not true. Regular practice can leave you feeling energised, relaxed and awake. It can also make you more able to make sensible choices, so that you waste less of your energy on habits and patterns that aren’t helpful.

8. Mindfulness means ‘emptying your mind’
   Not true. The mind will always generate thoughts and trying to change, suppress or resist them can be a big source of distress. It’s about altering your relationship to your thoughts so you can let them come and go.

I was skeptical about the benefits that mindfulness could offer to veterans. But after the first session and the encouragement of the nursing staff to practice it as often as possible, I’ve found mindfulness to be a wonderful tool when things get busy in my head.”

At Combat Stress we’re strong believers in the benefits of mindfulness on mental wellbeing. Yet as mindfulness grows in popularity, so do the number of myths that surround it.

Dr Barbara Mariposa is a medical doctor, public speaker and writer with a background in psychiatry and public health. Having always had an interest in the connection between mind, body and emotion, Dr Barbara has been using forms of meditation to improve her own mental health since the 1980s. We asked Dr Barbara to bust some of the more common mindfulness myths that could put people off giving it a try…

1. Mindfulness is complicated
   It’s not. Mindfulness is purely about being aware of the present moment and feeling connected, grounded and in touch with it. We find these moments many times in our lives by listening to music, doing something creative, or being with people we love.

2. Mindfulness fixes everything
   It doesn’t. You’ll feel clearer in your head, so you’ll be able to cope better with life’s challenges. But it’s not something that magically makes life’s ups and downs disappear.

3. Mindfulness is for everyone
   It’s not. Some people find it difficult to sit still and the pressure to do so can be counterproductive, making them feel like failures. Some people just don’t take to it and that’s fine.

4. Mindfulness is a quick fix
   It’s not. It takes self-discipline, perseverance and patience. It has enormous benefits like helping you be more focused, feel calmer and more balanced, but it takes regular practice over a period of time to see these benefits.

5. Mindfulness is hippie nonsense
   Not true. Scientific research shows that the brain changes shape according to how it’s used. Mindfulness appears to exercise certain areas of the brain in ways that alter its shape and functioning, which can improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

6. Mindfulness is therapy
   Definitely not. However, it is used in some treatment programmes as a technique to help people manage their mental health better.

7. Mindfulness makes you passive
   Not true. Regular practice can leave you feeling energised, relaxed and awake. It can also make you more able to make sensible choices, so that you waste less of your energy on habits and patterns that aren’t helpful.

8. Mindfulness means ‘emptying your mind’
   Not true. The mind will always generate thoughts and trying to change, suppress or resist them can be a big source of distress. It’s about altering your relationship to your thoughts so you can let them come and go.

I was skeptical about the benefits that mindfulness could offer to veterans. But after the first session and the encouragement of the nursing staff to practice it as often as possible, I’ve found mindfulness to be a wonderful tool when things get busy in my head.”

At Combat Stress we’re strong believers in the benefits of mindfulness on mental wellbeing. Yet as mindfulness grows in popularity, so do the number of myths that surround it.

Dr Barbara Mariposa is a medical doctor, public speaker and writer with a background in psychiatry and public health. Having always had an interest in the connection between mind, body and emotion, Dr Barbara has been using forms of meditation to improve her own mental health since the 1980s. We asked Dr Barbara to bust some of the more common mindfulness myths that could put people off giving it a try…

1. Mindfulness is complicated
   It’s not. Mindfulness is purely about being aware of the present moment and feeling connected, grounded and in touch with it. We find these moments many times in our lives by listening to music, doing something creative, or being with people we love.

2. Mindfulness fixes everything
   It doesn’t. You’ll feel clearer in your head, so you’ll be able to cope better with life’s challenges. But it’s not something that magically makes life’s ups and downs disappear.

3. Mindfulness is for everyone
   It’s not. Some people find it difficult to sit still and the pressure to do so can be counterproductive, making them feel like failures. Some people just don’t take to it and that’s fine.

4. Mindfulness is a quick fix
   It’s not. It takes self-discipline, perseverance and patience. It has enormous benefits like helping you be more focused, feel calmer and more balanced, but it takes regular practice over a period of time to see these benefits.

5. Mindfulness is hippie nonsense
   Not true. Scientific research shows that the brain changes shape according to how it’s used. Mindfulness appears to exercise certain areas of the brain in ways that alter its shape and functioning, which can improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

6. Mindfulness is therapy
   Definitely not. However, it is used in some treatment programmes as a technique to help people manage their mental health better.

7. Mindfulness makes you passive
   Not true. Regular practice can leave you feeling energised, relaxed and awake. It can also make you more able to make sensible choices, so that you waste less of your energy on habits and patterns that aren’t helpful.

8. Mindfulness means ‘emptying your mind’
   Not true. The mind will always generate thoughts and trying to change, suppress or resist them can be a big source of distress. It’s about altering your relationship to your thoughts so you can let them come and go.

I was skeptical about the benefits that mindfulness could offer to veterans. But after the first session and the encouragement of the nursing staff to practice it as often as possible, I’ve found mindfulness to be a wonderful tool when things get busy in my head.”
Lieutenant General Andrew Graham is Chairman at Combat Stress. Andrew served in the Army for 36 years before leaving in 2011. Since then he has taken on a number of executive and non-executive roles at organisations including the British Exploring Society, The Department for Work and Pensions and the Army Cadet Force Association.

We spoke to Andrew about meeting the mental health needs of veterans and what he thinks it means to feel ‘At Ease’.

What was it about Combat Stress that inspired you to take up the role?

I was very aware that for some former service folk, life after leaving can be extremely challenging. Just as I was asked to become a trustee, I had learned of two young veterans from my regiment who had felt so alone and desperate that they had taken their own lives. I felt that I could perhaps help to make a difference for others before they reached that state of mind.

How have the needs of veterans changed over time?

The recent shift in society’s attitude towards mental health means that many – but by no means all – servicemen and women are more prepared to speak out sooner. That has to be a good thing, but it raises an important challenge for us as younger veterans are likely to have work and family commitments, so they need mental health support and treatment that is accessible, flexible and time-effective. We should not underestimate the extent to which Combat Stress has shifted and continues to shift in order to meet this challenge.

When do you feel most at ease?

I am most at ease when my mind is balanced and I am well set to look life’s surprises in the eye. Practically, I am at ease when I’m playing a tune on my bagpipes! I am not particularly good, but because I am breathing deeply and I am focused on the sound, my fingers, my memory and the instrument, I can put them down and move onto something else with a spring in my step.

After six years as our Chairman, Andrew Graham is stepping down in October 2019 and Giles Peel will be taking over the role.

There’s almost a whole other language in the British military – while some of it is formal, some of it is slang used in everyday conversation.

‘Stand at ease’ is a military drill command for soldiers to loosen themselves into a more relaxed position during parade. But this doesn’t mean that soldiers can just loll about with nothing to do or think about when they hear this command. Standing at ease is a state of being relaxed, yet balanced and alert. Ready, but not over-anxious for what comes next.

In case you’ve ever felt like you had no idea what your veteran partner or friend were talking about, here are some military slang phrases to help you be more in the know!

1. Egg banjo
   A fried egg sandwich that, when eaten, drips down – resulting in the sandwich being raised in one hand to ear height while the free hand is used to ‘strum’ the yoke off.

2. Gleaming
   Used to describe something as good or brilliant.

3. Chin-strapped
   Means feeling exhausted or running on little to no sleep.

4. Buckshee
   A spare item of equipment or something that was given for free. For example: “I’ve got a buckshee daysack.”

5. Dhobi dust
   A slang term for washing powder used since the British military were stationed in India. ‘Dhobi’ is the Indian word for ‘washing’ or ‘laundry’.

6. Gonk bag
   A sleeping bag.

7. Civi, civy or civvy
   A civilian – someone who isn’t serving in the Armed Forces.
WEIGHTING IT OUT

On International Men’s Day last year, Sergeant Andy Unwin handcuffed himself to a 3kg medicine ball. This was the start of a long two weeks spent chained to the weight day and night – working, eating and sleeping without removing it once.

Andy took the challenge on to raise awareness of the invisible weight that veterans with mental health problems have to bear. We spoke to him about what the challenge means and why he thinks it’s been such a success.

“When you’re struggling with your mental health, every little task becomes a huge challenge. Things that were once easy – like shaving, shopping or doing household chores – become a major effort. The medicine ball represents the weight and burden that veterans with mental health problems carry around every day.

“In my previous unit I served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo. I knew there was a possibility of losing people while I was out there. But it was after I’d returned home that I lost some of my friends to suicide. I have lots of mates who are suffering from mental health problems due to the conflicts they’ve been involved in. Only a few months ago I heard that another guy from my old unit took his own life. Suicide amongst veterans and soldiers due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems is rising at an alarming rate. I find this hard to stomach.

“There’s a stigma around speaking out about mental health – especially in the military. I can’t help but think that so many deaths could’ve been prevented if only they’d felt they could talk about how they were feeling.

“I wanted to raise awareness of this invisible weight by bringing it out into the open. I also hoped the challenge would encourage people to speak out and seek help.

“When my two weeks with the medicine ball was up, I started encouraging friends to do the same. Since then, the same ball has been passed on to people around the country and the challenge has gained some real support. “It’s a simple idea that boldly represents how difficult life can be when you’re a veteran with mental health problems. The ball is helping to spread the message that not all wounds are visible. “You can go on operational tours and pick up injuries or lose limbs, and people can see what’s happened to you. But those struggling with PTSD, depression or anxiety because of what they’ve been through – they’re fighting a hidden war, one in their minds.

“When you unshackle yourself from the ball at the end of the challenge you get a huge sense of freedom and weightlessness. I hope my challenge goes some way to helping veterans and those currently serving begin their path to recovery so that they can experience the same one day.”

Currently the ball is still being passed on to dozens of others wanting to get involved.

“When you’re struggling with your mental health, every little task becomes a huge challenge.”

£5,000

Andy and those taking part in the Medicine Ball Challenge have raised over £5,000 for Combat Stress and ABF The Soldiers’ Charity.

Get involved

If you’re feeling inspired and you’d like to get involved in the medicine ball challenge, visit Andy’s fundraising page at virginmoneygiving.com/not_all_wounds_are_visible for more information.

And if the medicine ball challenge isn’t for you, don’t worry: there are lots of other ways you can help to raise funds. Find out more at combatstress.org.uk/getinvolved
“I love chasing the round thing that the humans kick about when they’re outside.”

“Sometimes I get quite fidgety, so the humans put me in a big sphere that I can run around in for ages and ages – it’s great!”

“Often a week, veterans receiving treatment at Hollybush House are visited by either Zorran (a German Shepherd) or Maisie (a King Charles Springer Spaniel). The dogs stay for a few hours at a time in the communal lounge or outside in the treatment centre grounds.

“Zorran and Maisie have completely different personalities, so the effects they have on people are entirely different too. Zorran’s energetic and bouncy, so veterans tend to play ball with him and end up moving their bodies a lot. You can see how uplifted and motivated the veterans become when they’re spending time with him.

“Maisie, on the other hand, is a lot calmer and is very cuddly. Interacting with her can be a tactile experience because she loves being stroked – I see veterans become calmer when they’re around her, and you can see that they’re building a real connection with her.

“More recently, Hollybush House gained two new residents: guinea pigs Woody and Buzz.

“The veterans volunteer to help look after Woody and Buzz over the weekends – they’re in charge of keeping them fed, watered and cleaned out. It gives the guys something to care for – having that responsibility can bring about a sense of purpose, which is important for mental wellbeing.

“There was one veteran who came for treatment recently who had Parkinson’s. He used to have a dog and had been really missing that relationship, but because of his condition he wanted a smaller pet. As soon as Buzz was in his lap and he was stroking him, his tremors stopped. The guinea pigs had such a calming effect on him that he said he was going to buy his own guinea pig as soon as he finished treatment.

“Any interaction with an animal creates some sort of connection. I think it’s these connections that can bring so much comfort, even in the most difficult of times.”

“Sometimes I get quite fidgety, so the humans put me in a big sphere that I can run around in for ages and ages – it’s great!”
ARE YOU A VETERAN?
WE CAN HELP WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.

We are the UK’s leading charity for veterans’ mental health. Our free 24-hour Helpline provides confidential mental health advice.

You, your family, friends or carers can contact us anytime, day or night, for help and support.

Call 0800 138 1619
Text 07537 404 719*
Email helpline@combatstress.org.uk
Visit combatstress.org.uk

*Standard charges may apply for texts, please check with your provider.

Combat Stress, Company Registered in England & Wales No. 256353.
Charity Registration No. 206002 (SC038829 in Scotland).
Supporting our Military, Veteran & Blue Light Community

Are you a serving member or retired member of...

The Armed Forces
Police Service
Prison Service
Fire & Rescue
The NHS
Civil or Public servant

Then call us about a discounted new car

As Europe’s No.1 Military, Diplomatic, and Blue Light new car supplier, we know a few things about our market, and being owned and run by ex-military staff, we know a few things about our customers too. That’s why we are committed to bring you the very best savings on a new car anywhere in our industry.

With genuinely exclusive savings across 18 different brands we are the first and last place to find your next new car for less than you thought possible.

GET THE LOOK

Support our work and look the part. Check out our online shop for all kinds of kit, gifts and goodies!

To see the full range visit combatstress.shop

We are exceptionally proud to be Official Corporate Sponsors for Combat Stress.

Helping provide vital help to our serving military and veterans.

WWW.GRIFFINTAXFREE.COM/COMBAT-STRESS/
PHONE: 01273 574000

Company Registered in England & Wales No. 256353.
Charity Registration no. 206002 (SC038829 in Scotland).
Looking after me

Lance Corporal Richard Jones is a magician who won Britain’s Got Talent in 2016 and is also an Ambassador of the British Army. We spoke to Richard about magic, being on stage and feeling at ease after a big show.

How did you get into magic?

Being in the Army and travelling around the world, I’ve spent a lot of time on planes or coaches with a lot of bored people. It seemed like the ideal opportunity to pick up a new hobby – so I started practising the basics and it went from there. I was always with a large group of people who I could practise performing on, which was exactly what I needed.

How does performing magic make you feel?

I feel most alive when I’m on stage: magic literally lights me up. I love to see the look of wonder on people’s faces too, it’s the most rewarding feeling I’ve ever had.

Do you ever get nervous before you perform? If so, how do you calm your nerves?

Sometimes in the build-up to a show I get quite nervous. But I’m very aware that the feeling will pass and that when I get out on stage I’ll be totally in the moment. When things feel particularly scary, my little trick is to listen to the song Footloose by Kenny Loggins. It always relaxes me and cheers me up!

What do you think people love about watching magic being performed?

I think that watching magic takes us out of our daily reality, which is a big part of its appeal. When we’re faced with difficulties in our lives, we want something that can take our minds off them for a little while. Magic always makes people smile, they can’t help it.

How do you unwind after a busy day?

I struggle to unwind because I’m on the go all the time. But I do find that reading helps me feel calmer after a busy day: a good book puts me in a different space altogether.

When are you feeling most at ease?

I feel at ease when I’ve finished performing and I know that it’s been a good show. In those cases, I always go out to the foyer of the theatre and meet everyone as they leave, which is where I feel most comfortable. I can just joke around and be sociable because the pressure is off.

Has there ever been a time when you’ve not felt at ease? If so, how did you deal with this?

I knew that there were millions of people watching when I was on Britain’s Got Talent, so this was definitely a time when I wasn’t feeling at ease. I tried to remember that I was only able to control so much, and beyond that I had to forgive myself if things went wrong. I told myself that however the performance went, I’d accept that I’d done my best.

What’s one thing you do to take care of your mental health?

Every week I sit down and decide what I want to achieve over the next seven days. As a performer there’s a big difference between what people expect of you and what you want to do for yourself. Sometimes we all get caught between what people want us to do and what we want to do for ourselves. It’s important to strive for a good balance of both.

Richard brings his nationwide tour to The Core at Corby on Friday 13 September. Tickets are available at richardjonessmagic.co.uk/tour-dates.
Our annual Festival of Lessons and Carols for Christmas is taking place on Wednesday 11 December 2019 at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London.

For more information or to book contact Sue Thornton on sue.thornton@combatstress.org.uk or 01372 587 148 or visit combatstress.org.uk/events