

DEFENCE MINISTER PRESENTS MEDALS AND VETERANS BADGES AT COLCHESTER ADVICE ROADSHOW

On 20 November, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Kevan Jones MP presented WWII Medals and HM Armed Forces Veterans Badges to veterans from Colchester, Chelmsford, Holbrook and Cambridge. The presentation, at the Musket Club, Fallowfield Road, Colchester was attended by the Deputy Lieutenant of Essex, John Burrow CBE QPM DL, the Mayor of Colchester, Cllr Margaret Fairley-Crowe, local MP, Bob Russell, senior members of the Armed Forces and veterans groups.

The event was part of a wider campaign in the region to raise awareness of the help and support provided for current and former members of the Armed Forces by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, in partnership with local charity and voluntary bodies. The campaign included a two-day advice event at the Musket Club, a mobile advice unit visiting Romford, Chelmsford and Ipswich, prominent newspaper advertising and the distribution of over 1,300 poster and leaflet packs to local libraries, supermarkets, shops, clubs and other public locations. For veterans, a free helpline **0800 169 2277** and website **www.veterans-uk.info** are also available.

Kevan Jones MP, Under-Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans said:

“We owe a lot to our Armed Forces and veterans – and it’s a real privilege for me to be here today to present these Medals and Veterans Badges. There are thousands veterans and still serving people in the Essex and Suffolk area, so I can’t overstate how important this awareness campaign is. I want to be sure that we are getting the message through to all of them, and their families, about the services and support we provide. I am pleased that so many people have come along to hear what’s available.”

The Minister presented three WWII Medals, the 1939-45 Star, the France and Germany Star and the War Medal to:

Mr Sidney Brewster (age 83, from Chelmsford)

Mr Brewster enlisted on 17 February 1944 and served with the Wiltshire Regiment, the Somerset Light Infantry and the Berkshire Regiment in Belgium, Holland and Germany. He was wounded twice in action in February and April 1945. After the war ended, he continued to serve in Germany guarding the autobahns and then Belsen Camp after the internees had left. Mr

Brewster then returned home to Boreham, near Chelmsford, where he married in 1951 and continues to live. Mr Brewster had never previously been awarded his medals. [Details of the medals presented can be found in the annex.]

Mr Gerry Solomon (age 92, from Holbrook, Suffolk) **and Mr William (Harry) Finlayson** (age 93, from Bridgwater, Somerset)

Please see the annex for details of the reunion of Mr Solomon and Mr Finlayson, both former members of the Royal Tank Regiment, after some 67 years.

Mrs Wilma Sutton (age 58, from Colchester)

Mrs Sutton joined the Women's Royal Army Corps in October 1969 at age 19. She spent two years in London, working as a staff clerk within the Ministry of Defence. During this time, she took part in Remembrance Services at the Albert Hall, the Cenotaph and Westminster Abbey. Her last posting was in January 1972 at the Headquarters, British Army of the Rhine, in Rheindahlen. Wilma met her husband, Terry, whilst serving in Germany and they married in 1972. She was demobbed in August of that year.

Miss Jackie Kidd (age 30, from Cambridge)

Miss Kidd is a former Corporal in the Royal Corps of Signals. She served in the Army from 1995 until 2005. During her 10 years' Service, she spent time on operations in Kosovo and spent over three years working in bomb disposal.

Mr Nigel Burke (age 47, from Colchester)

Former Staff Sgt Burke enlisted in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1979. During his 23 years in the Army, he undertook three tours of duty in Northern Ireland, as well as Service in the Falkland Islands, Kosovo, Berlin, Gibraltar, USA, Canada and Australia. He was discharged from the Adjutant Generals Corps in 2003, later working for Essex Police.

Mrs Victoria Bateman (age 24, from Colchester)

Mrs Bateman is the widow of LCpl James Bateman from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment. LCpl Bateman was killed in the service of his country, on 12 June 2008, on Operation Herrick 8 in Afghanistan. Mrs Bateman receives her HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge in her own right as a member of the veterans community and in recognition of her husband's loyal and brave service and sacrifice for The Parachute Regiment and his country.

Mrs Olive Doe (age 89, from Colchester)

Mrs Doe joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. Following training in Devizes, Wiltshire, she served throughout the war until her discharge in 1945. After the war, she married Frederick Doe who had also seen Service, with the Royal Artillery from 1939 to 1945. Regrettably, Frederick contracted Rheumatic Fever during his time serving in Iraq, leaving him with respiratory problems that resulted in his untimely death in 1982. Mrs Doe receives her veterans badge both as a veteran and as a war widow.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

1. On 19 and 20 November, current and former members of the Armed Forces visited the Musket Club to receive one to one help on many issues, including Armed Forces injury compensation, pensions, benefits, medals, future employment and the full range of welfare support provided for veterans. Advice was available from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, Joint Personnel Administration Centre, Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, Armed Forces Pensions, Veterans Welfare Service, Regular Forces Employment Association, MOD Medal Office, RAF Benevolent Fund, Pensions, Disability and Carers Service (DWP), The Royal British Legion, SSAFA Forces Help and the Army Benevolent Fund.
2. The HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge was launched in May 2004 and is now available to anyone who has served in the Armed Forces. Further information, along with help and advice on any issue affecting veterans' lives, can be obtained from the SPVA's free *Veterans-UK* helpline 0800 169 2277 or website www.veterans-uk.info .
3. Images:
 - a. Veterans Mobile Advice Unit
 - b. HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge
 - c. Kevan Jones MP, Under-Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans.



For Further Information

4. For further information on the campaign, please contact David Johnson, Service Personnel and Veterans Agency press office, on 01253 333041, mobile 07717 882014.

ANNEX A – REUNION OF TWO WWII VETERANS AFTER 67 YEARS.

William Henry Finlayson from Woolavington, nr Bridgwater, Somerset

Mr William Henry Finlayson (Harry) was born into a military family and enlisted in the Army in 1934. He served in the North West Frontier in India prior to the outbreak of WWII. He later saw action in France and was part of the support for troops during the withdrawal from Dunkirk. He then became part of the 8th Army in the North Africa Campaign and during a battle on 24 November 1941, his tank's radio was damaged and he did not hear an order to withdraw. He carried on fighting until his tank was disabled and he was captured by Italian forces. He was reported 'missing presumed killed in action' and was 'buried' in Libya!

Following his capture, Mr Finlayson was sent to Greece, then Italy, and later marched to Germany. En-route, he was taken to one of the concentration camps, when he ordered his men to 'show the enemy how British troops die' and stood them to attention ready for what they all thought would be their last minutes. He remained a Prisoner of War for the duration of WWII in Stalag 344. He was finally released by the Americans in 1945. Following liberation and discharge, he returned to civilian life and had no contact with his friend, Gerry Solomon.

Gerry Solomon from Stutton, near Holbrook, Suffolk

Mr Gerry Solomon volunteered for the Army in 1939. After training, he joined the 5th Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment in 1940. He saw action in the North Africa Campaign under Field Marshall Montgomery, including El Alamein and the relief of Tobruk. He saw further action in Tunisia and the liberation of Italy, before being returned to the UK in preparation for the D-Day landings. Entering Northern France on D-Day plus 1, he saw Service in North West Europe until August 1944, when his tank was hit and he was injured. He returned to the UK and was later medically downgraded. He ended his Service at the end of 1945, helping to re-train repatriated Prisoners of War. Following discharge, he too settled back into civilian life and thought his good friend, Harry, to have been killed in action in 1941.

Finding each other 67 years later

Harry's daughter, Patsy, recently wrote a letter (without her father's knowledge) to *Tank* magazine, which was published. She was later surprised to receive an e-mail from Gerry Solomon's daughter. Gerry had read the letter and was amazed and stunned that a man he thought was killed in action was still alive and kicking!

By working with the Royal Tank Regiment, it has been possible, exceptionally, to present Gerry and Harry with their HM Armed Forces Veterans Badges at the same event, allowing them to be reunited for the first time - almost 67 years after they last saw each other*.

* A private reunion took place on 19 November with both men attending the presentation of HM Armed Forces Veterans Badges on 20 November.

Annex B– Background to the medals presented to Mr Sidney Brewster.

1939-45 Star

The 1939–45 Star was awarded for any period of operational service overseas between 3 September 1939 and 8 May 1945 (2 September 1945 in the Far East). The criteria are 180 days' Service between these dates, although some special criteria apply when, at certain specified times, just one day's service is required. Naval personnel qualify after 180 days afloat in areas of operations as laid out in the regulations between certain specified dates. RAF air crew will qualify with 60 days' Service in an operational unit including at least one operational sortie. Air crew of fighter aircraft engaged in the Battle of Britain between 10 July and 31 October 1940 were awarded the Clasp 'Battle of Britain' to be worn on the ribbon of the 1939-45 Star. The ribbon has equal stripes of dark blue, to represent the service of the Royal and Merchant Navies; red, to represent that of the Armies and light blue to represent that of Air Forces. Worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.

France and Germany Star

The France and Germany Star was awarded for one or more days' service in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands or Germany between 6 June 1944 and 8 May 1945. The ribbon is in the colours of the Union Flag, also symbolising those of France and the Netherlands, a central red stripe flanked by white and blue stripes of equal width.

War Medal

The War Medal was awarded to all full time personnel of the Armed Forces wherever they were serving, provided they had served for at least 28 days between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945. The War Medal shows the crowned head of King George VI, while the reverse bears a lion standing on a dragon with two heads, above are the dates 1939 and 1945. The ribbon is in the colours of the Union Flag, a narrow central red stripe flanked by narrow white stripes, wider blue stripes and then red.