

SUMMER WASN'T A WASHOUT FOR VETERANS

A series of announcements and events were held during the summer. The overall aim to bring to life the objectives of the Veterans Programme.

VETERANS PROGRAMME

The Veterans Programme was launched in 2001 to ensure that the needs of the nation's 5 million veterans, and the additional 5 million widows, widowers and dependants, were addressed effectively across Government.

The Programme's three key objectives are to ensure that:

- as many Service personnel as possible make the transition from Service to civilian life successfully;
- appropriate support is available to those veterans who have difficulty in doing so;
- the contribution made by current and ex-Service personnel to national and international security is recognised, understood and appreciated.

RECOGNITION

The wet and windy weather across the United Kingdom this summer could not dampen the spirits of veterans and members of the general public who turned out to support Veterans events.

Veterans have certainly been in the public spotlight this summer. The commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the Falklands Conflict culminated, on 17 June, in a spectacular parade of the Armed Forces and veterans from that era. Those who attended, or viewed the television coverage, could not fail to have been moved by the personal testimonies of veterans who served during that Conflict or the families of those who tragically lost their lives. Despite the sombre and commemorative nature of the day it was clearly evident that there still exists a deep-rooted camaraderie amongst the veterans, many of who are much younger than the traditional image of a veteran. The Celebrations afforded a good opportunity to reinforce the mes-

sage that there is help and advice available to veterans and their families and friends through the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) free phone helpline – 0800 169 2277 or website www.veterans-uk.info

Despite the weather many veterans and members of the general public attended the national Veterans Day event in Birmingham, held on 27 June, and flagship events including London, Blackpool and Torquay. More than 250 Veterans Day events across the UK succeeded in raising awareness of veterans issues while providing a great fun day out for all involved.

Observant visitors would have noticed that many of our veterans at Veterans Day events and Falklands commemorations were wearing their HM Armed Forces Veterans Badge or UK Merchant Seafarers Veterans Badge with great pride. On Veterans Day Derek Twigg, Minister for Veterans extended eligibility to apply for the badges to those who served prior to 31 December 1994. This is the penultimate extension: the final announcement, which will close the gap between veterans and those who receive their badge at the point of discharge will be made in due course. Any veteran still to claim their badge should contact the SPVA.



TRANSITION

The quality and scope of the resettlement process for service leavers continues to improve.



66% of Service leavers found employment within a month of discharge, rising to 94% within 6 months.

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) service was used by 92% of Service leavers up to the year ending 31 March 2007.

The CPT has extended the range of vocational training courses and is modernising other courses. The list of quality-assessed external training providers has grown by about 20% in the past 6 months. Newly developed, locally delivered quality resettlement training is linked to employment opportunities, a key enhancement to the new CTP contract.

The robustness and quality support for medically discharged personnel continues to improve. A revised Army Sickness Absence Management process is in place highlighting soldiers on sick leave ensuring regular con-

tact and access to a resourced casework management regime.

Provision for Early Service Leavers (ESL) continues to strengthen. The definition of an ESL has been extended to cover all those not entitled to access CTP services, ie. those who have served less than 4 years, now receive a mandatory structured resettlement briefing. They are interviewed to assess their vulnerability to social exclusion and personal individual resettlement plans are developed. Initial analysis from the most recent pan-Government survey of ESL employment status indicates that about 61% of them are in work within 6 months of discharge. Of the remainder a substantial number return to further education or vocational training under DWP Jobcentre Plus programmes. However, these figures need to be placed in context as a lot of ESL are discharged before completing their basic military training.

Interim arrangements have been implemented so that Service leavers are given the opportunity to have their contact details passed to 'gatekeeper' charities. These are the three single Service benevolent funds/trusts, the Royal British Legion and SSAFA Forces Help, who will act as first point of call for support from the wider charitable community. For those in hospital or rehabilitation, arrangements exist via the Defence Medical Welfare Service, to establish contact with specialist medical charities and the wider ex-Service charity sector.

SUPPORT

The package of support available to our veterans is continually under review.

Every year more than 20,000 personnel leave the Armed Forces. Whilst the number of those who experience difficulties during the transition from Service to civilian life, and in the years that follow, may be small in comparison, building and promoting awareness of health issues associated with military service is a key focus of our work with the Department of Health and the Devolved Administrations.


The MOD is working closely with the NHS and Combat Stress across the UK to launch a pilot scheme for a new community based mental health service for veterans. The first pilot will begin in late 2007 with plans to launch a further six pilots in the following months. The pilots will last two years, followed by national rollout. The aim is to provide evidence-based treatments using NHS best practice. War pensions funding for eligible war pensioners to spend periods at Combat Stress homes will continue, with financial support enabling the charity to enhance its capability.

People often delay seeking help for mental symptoms. With veterans, one of the reasons is because they feel that it will be a waste of time. *Civilian health professionals just won't understand; they are unfamiliar with military life and its challenges.* A key aim of the pilot is that services provided will be accessible and acceptable to veterans. However, it will take sometime to set up. In June, the Minister

for Veterans announced that as an interim measure the Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) at St Thomas's Hospital would be extended. An expert assessment will be offered by a consultant psychiatrist with extensive military experience, to any veteran with active service from 1982, which includes Gulf 1990 - 1991 veterans, Porton Down veterans, and veterans of the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Resource constraints prevent the service including treatment but the consultant psychiatrist will then provide support and advice to civilian colleagues in the veteran's local area who will have charge of his care.



The MOD, health departments and Royal Colleges are also working together to increase civilian health professionals' awareness of military and veterans' matters.

 For more information on MAP visit www.veterans-uk.info