



The Mid Magazine News

The BNTVA Newsletter

Christmas 2020

Lighten our Darkness

by the BNTVA Chaplain,
the Very Rev Nicholas Frayling, KStJ.

The Christian year begins on Advent Sunday, with the important weeks of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Then, a month later, it's 'Happy New Year' all over again; but, in between, comes Christmas, the celebration of the birth of the One Christians believe to be the human face of God. This year, Covid has brought many changes to our daily routine, and we have even been forbidden to sing well-loved carols, except in the open air, weather permitting! But even in the grimmest of circumstances, Christmas is a time of joy, because, as the old carol says, 'love came down at Christmas'. There is joy for all people - as the Bible says, especially those who 'dwell in a land of deep darkness', in loneliness and suffering. Christmas is a time to reflect on Jesus's message of peace and goodwill. Perhaps this is where the new year comes in, a time to reflect on the year past, and to make fresh resolutions, hopes of a new beginning in the year that lies ahead. For those of us who take the Christmas message of peace and goodwill seriously, on New Year's Day and every day, we should remember there's a job to be done, which is to give love, and go on giving it, over and over, starting, as Jesus did, with the most unlikely people. My prayer is that God will bless all our Members, their families and our supporters this Christmas and through 2021.

Chair's Message, by Ceri McDade UniDip (Theol) PGCert (MHPsych)
PG Dip (SocRes).

Many of our veterans have requested a monthly newsletter, so we have decided to send a newsletter in the months that no magazine is issued. Due to the success of including a Remembrance template of the BNTVA crest in the Autumn magazine, we thought a Christmas crest would bring a little colour at the end of a tough year for everyone, to complete as a Christmas decoration or to place in your window. For those on Facebook, please enter our Christmas competition to post your finished pictures on the BNTVA page by 31 December, and the winner will receive a BNTVA tea towel and two coasters.

Since the last magazine, and thanks to Wesley's super-sleuthing, we've located the Wales Standard in Risca. I rushed down the day lockdown eased in Wales, to meet up with two nuclear test veterans, Michael Aubrey and Ken Preece. Mike and Ken, close neighbours, were unaware of each another, yet had both worked on the clean-up after Operation Dominic. We met at St Mary's Church, where Mike showed Ken and I a small plaque inside. On the plaque was inscribed, "*This plaque and standard is dedicated to the memory of nuclear test veterans who served on the Pacific Islands and in Australia during the Tests 1952-1965*". Mike told us that behind the plaque and inside the Standard, he placed a list of local nuclear test veterans who participated in the tests. It was a very moving afternoon, which filled us with enthusiasm to find and link up with more nuclear test veterans.





Since posting in the Royal British Legion magazine, and the Big Issue, we have heard from 47 veterans to date, who have either lost touch with the Association years ago, or who had never heard of the BNTVA. We have heard that there are many more nuclear test veterans 'out there', and we will continue to advertise in military magazines regularly. We have factored in an advertising cost for connecting veterans in future charitable funding applications. The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) has fully funded the two previous editions of the Campaign magazine and will fund the next two editions (including postage), and the Veterans' Foundation has agreed to fully fund four further editions plus postage costs, as they see the importance of keeping our veterans connected.

Veterans' Narratives

We'd like to thank the veterans who have sent in narratives of their time spent at the nuclear tests, along with photographs and other documents. For those of you who are thinking of sending your story, please do – don't feel left out - as every story is significant, whether a paragraph or multiple pages. We will continue to post our readers' stories in Campaign, and the remainder on the website, as we receive so many. We have just relaunched the website, paid for by the AFCFT, and are posting these stories for the general public to read and gain understanding of the facts, feelings and harsh environment surrounding the nuclear tests.



Following the recent lockdown and current tier systems, Squeaky Pedal are preparing for a road trip to interview a number of veterans as soon as restrictions ease, to make their videos of stories, animation and photographs. We're also excited that a number of veterans have felt compelled to write factual books of their experiences at the tests, and would encourage others to do so, as so many people have never heard of the British nuclear tests and British participation in Operation Dominic.

I was particularly humbled and touched by the following excerpt taken

from Ron Taylor's spine-chilling yet powerful narrative of his experience of the hydrogen bomb during Operation Grapple:

"Christmas Island, your discoverer Captain Cook and the fable of his epic 18th century voyage, you can keep. You are nothing but a barren outcrop of crustaceans welded together so that manic men can stop on it and practice ending the World with their toys of nuclear fission. Practice – that's a laugh. No-one is going to convince those who crouched in apprehension and fear under a nuclear holocaust 240 times more powerful than that which decimated Hiroshima (the British Ministry of Defence written admission, not mine) that this was practice. This was for real."



The countdown tannoyed over the clearing. Forty seconds to detonation, 20 seconds, 10.... The announcer's voice hesitated as it reached zero. The surge of penetrating heat burning through its body's back admitted that it, too, had never felt a million hot needles suddenly entering its skin all at the same time. Seconds later – some say less than twenty – the thundering blast of the Hydrogen Bomb's soundwave tore into eardrums told to expect nothing more than the report alongside a 303 Enfield rifle. "That was quite a firecracker, wasn't it", Mr Tannoy weakly offered, trying to sound unabashed but clearly quaking from its effect. "You may now turn around and face ground zero".



The most powerful, fervent rantings of Billy Graham in full flow, with his total command of the English language frightening his audience with Hell's fire and damnation, could never find the final words to describe the monster before our eyes that awful morning. Hell had emerged from the bowels of Mother Earth to defy and do battle with the Good Lord's heavenly sky above us. We gazed transfixed at the boiling cauldron of fire which was enveloping the island's southern world. Clouds of searing steam billowed around the huge crimson fireball, both growing bigger and even more menacing as each half minute passed.

No-one spoke. The clearing of 500 men was silent – awe-struck. Each felt he was seeing a happening so enormous that the earth's very survival seemed in peril. Soon the white, pillow-like, rotating clouds were turning darker, blackening the affronted sky and ominously turning towards us. The rich, clear blue above the Pacific would never return, we were convinced of that. The ride back to the tented camp in the 3-tonner Army truck was made in

silence. Only the drone of the tyres on the fiercely hard coral track disturbed the quiet of our thoughts as the ever-darkening ball of horror crept menacingly behind us along the way.

Much has been argued about the fallout which followed. How the constant, torrential downpour of radiation-enriched rain flooding into our tents twenty-four hours later may have subsequently affected the lives of the servicemen that April. But, of course, it was only a practice! We were to 'practice' again, a further four times over the next five months. Except that when we cowered below those massive megaton monsters we were never again protectively dressed as white-clad Martians. No, 'they' practiced on us with our issued shorts, boots and gaiters, and trilby-type floppy hats as our only wearing apparel. Perhaps 'they' had come to think that nuclear radiation couldn't go any deeper than bare skin. In this so-called enlightened world of progress, when the only glow in the sky above you now is a beautiful, God-given sunset, try convincing those whose lives have been cut down with cancers, whose offspring have been blighted with malformities, whose widows ache for the return of love



lost so unnecessarily that 'they' were right to 'practice'. You won't succeed. Neither will 'they'."

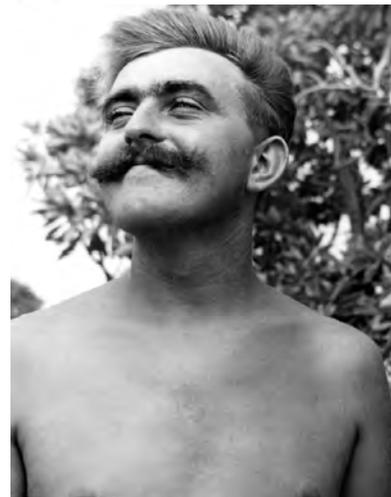
Passing of Mrs Sylvia Doris Williams



Dear Ceri,

Prior to the passing of my wife (Sylvia Doris Williams (D. 23/10/20)), known to most simply as Sylv, we had talked about supporting the BNTVA in some way. When planning for Sylv's funeral last month, when we were asked, we suggested rather than buying flowers that they could instead, make donations to the BNTVA, which would have been Sylvia's preference. So, myself and the family are proud to enclose cheques totalling £760. There are likely to have been others made directly through your web site, perhaps also including one from Canada (although possibly that could be either in reference to my name or my daughter/son-in Law - Hammond) without direct reference to Sylvia.

I had been posted to Christmas Island in 1958 arriving via the 'Happy Troop Ship' Dunera.



My time there was spent on X Site as a lance corporal helping to run the power station which contained 5 generators producing 400KW, principally to run the radar scanners. The 100-gallon diesel tank required filling each shift by climbing an old wooden ladder which only relied upon every other rung – clearly an early form of budget cuts!

For the entire period of my service, I was given the nickname of Joe (possibly after Joseph Stalin on account of my handlebar moustache) which stuck with me till the end of my service, which I finished out at Longmore camp, Hants. During my service on the Island, I witnessed 5 atomic bomb drops. After one instance we were out to view the drop with various extra layers for protection including; long trousers, long sleeve shirt, cloths

around our necks and with heavy gauntlets on our hands – all to protect us against any possible burning. After a suitable period had passed, we were told we could turn around to look. Even then, it was still so bright, I can remember putting my bare hands in front of my eyes and it seemed like I could see my bones straight through my skin.

We left the island on a Bristol Britannia almost a year after first arriving. Whenever it landed for return trips for other servicemen, we could always feel the ground beneath our feet move slightly, such was the delicate balance of the island.

I was engaged in December 1955 to Sylv with the intervening period allowing both of us to pursue our road racing on bikes, which allowed us to tour many parts of southern and western England – all in the name of training. We waited till I left the Army to get married in 1960 and have had a very full and happy 60 years together which was also underpinned by a congratulative message from the Queen organised by our children.

Yours Sincerely,

Allan G. Williams

Note to Editor: Sylvia will be lovingly remembered by Husband Allan, Children Stephen and Allison, with grandchildren Beckie, Luke and Flynn as well as one great grandson Mason. Many Friends and family will all miss her with fond memories of many parties, particularly in South London and Newbury.



Decision by the Advisory Military Sub-Committee (AMSC) concerning the Award of a Medal



On 9th December we were informed by Dr Charles Winstanley of the AMSC, that, after months of deliberation, a medal would not be issued to the nuclear test veterans. The letter stated that the original submission in 2019 had not satisfied the 'risk and rigour' element of the criteria. Following the letter, we felt disheartened, but then recouped to fight back on behalf of our veterans. We replied to Dr Winstanley, raising the following points, which we backed up with hard evidence of decisions previously made and MOD correspondence around the time of the tests.

Our letter has now been submitted to the AMSC to be reconsidered in January in light of the new primary evidence we have provided. Our letter states:

- In 2002, the Queen awarded the New Zealand Special Service Medal (Nuclear Testing) to NZ servicemen who participated alongside British servicemen, during the same tests at the same time, at Maralinga, Malden Island, and Christmas Island.
- The British government paid £20m compensation to the Australian government between 1994-1998 to bring a full and final settlement of future compensation claims.
- The nuclear tests were risky as a special operation, and certainly not a part of routine service.
- In 2017, UK servicemen trained as drone operators, who participated in Operation Shader, were awarded a medal for targeting ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq, whilst situated in Lincolnshire at the time. Their medal for non-combatant warfare included consideration of psychological effects of this type of warfare.
- HMS Diana sailed through the nuclear fallout twice during Operation Mosaic.
- Canberra pilots flew through the nuclear cloud for 12 and a half minutes to take readings.
- The nuclear tests were deemed as 'experiments' by the MOD on 'personnel and equipment'.
- There was a deception at Nandi airport, where RAF personnel were told to cover up the fact the engines were radioactively 'hot'; they were told not to wear protective clothing in order not to rouse suspicion. Personnel were issued with safety certificates despite knowing the engines may well be radioactive.
- The latest peer-reviewed scientific research outlining that the lasting effects of even low to moderate ionizing radiation causes cognitive dysfunction and physical inflammatory disturbances.

Sir John Hayes wrote to Dr Winstanley, echoing our letter, whilst Susie Boniface has reported on multiple occasions in the Daily Mirror and mirror online in the past few days regarding the AMSC decision. On 11 December, Sir John applied for a debate in the House of Commons, to overturn the decision. Due to their Christmas recess commencing on 20 December, there isn't time to fit this in during the next week, so he will apply for a debate when the MPs return on 7 January. Sir John has rallied over 70 cross-party MP's to actively support the award of a medal to the nuclear test veterans, including front bench Conservatives, Sir Keir Starmer, and Ian Blackford, SNP Leader. This list is growing daily.

Sir John is working for MPs to put pressure on the civil servants, to bring about a reversal of the decision. These MPs are armed with our letter and file of evidence, ready for the debate, which we believe will happen early in January 2021.

We have meetings set up with various MPs for early January, and we will report with further information in the Winter Campaign magazine (February 2021).

If you'd like to contact your MP with our letter and evidence, please contact the BNTVA, and we'll send you a copy to send on.



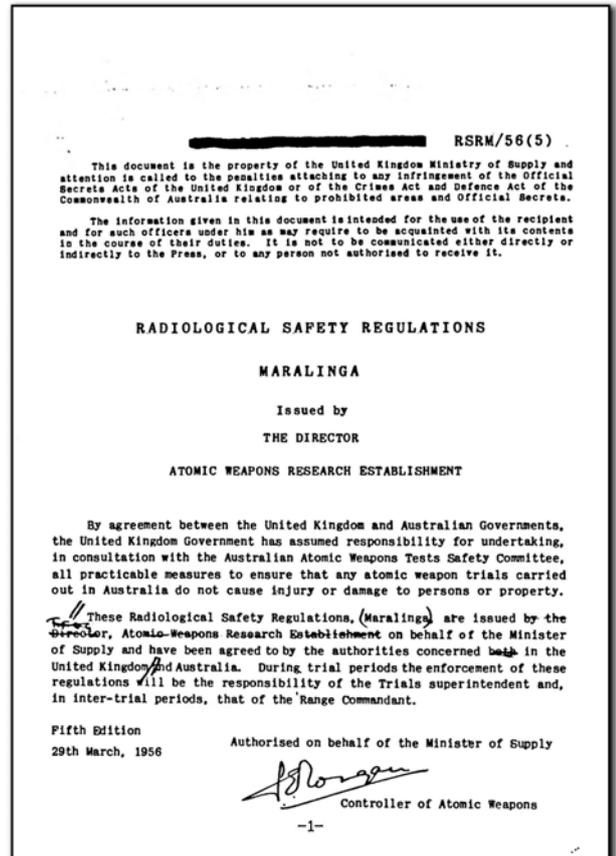
BNTVA Appeal for Documentation

Further to the grant funding we have received from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust during the Covid-19 period, we have purchased a static copy stand and a portable digitising scanner. These high-quality pieces of equipment enable us to make excellent copies of documents and photographs that look almost as good as the originals.

Due to the response that we received last week from the Advisory Military Sub-Committee, the BNTVA is collating as many documents as possible to add to the current collection. These documents are invaluable to the Association, as fragmented as they might seem by themselves. We would be grateful that if you hold any information, declassified memos from the time of the tests, letters from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE), National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) or other facility, and would like to share them with us, please let us know. We are happy to accept copies, or originals, that we can scan and return. You may never realise how crucial a particular document can be in its own right – it may just be a fit for the context of something bigger.

We have gained the interest of many MPs concerning the nuclear tests, associated feelings and health effects that we consider to part of working in a Special Operation, rather than part of a routine exercise. The more information that we have, which we can organise as part of a library, and link with current and previous research, the stronger the BNTVA will be.

Please contact on 0208 144 3080, info@bntva.com or post to The Smithy, Defynnog, Brecon, Powys LD3 8SB.



BNTVA Welfare Service

We have assisted a number of veterans and their families over the last few months regarding delivery of prescriptions, funeral arrangements, accessing appropriate help for complex mental health needs, signposting to other organisations, overturning decisions made by Clinical Commissioning Groups, and advocacy. We are developing multiple ways to assist veterans who want to connect, and will announce new initiatives in the Spring. We're conscious that help may be needed during the Christmas period, and we will be available on 0208 144 3080 to take calls. We provide:

- **Telephone Friendship Groups (we still have four places available, so please contact us if you would like to join) starting in March 2021, for veterans to chat together in groups of six over the phone on a weekly basis. If wives and widows show an interest in this, then we will roll this out and include a specific women-only group too. If you are interested in becoming involved in a women's group, please let us know.**
- **Referral to Pastoral Support with our Chaplain or a qualified counsellor.**
- **Advice/signposting over the phone to work with veterans and their families to deal with practical issues.**
- **Bereavement advice and use of the coffin drape at no cost to families.**
- **Help with form-filling, provision of advocacy and links to specialist advocacy support.**

Finally, we would like to wish you all a Very Merry Christmas & Happy New Year, from the BNTVA Trustees. Thank you all for your support during 2020.

