

Your impact on the lives of blind veterans

Debrief

Winter 2026



We're stronger together



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

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remembers**
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Welcome



Adrian Bell CEO, Blind Veterans UK

Dear Supporter,

I must begin by wishing you a happy new year. I do hope it has begun well for you and your loved ones.

January is often a time for self-reflection and improvement – and if you're finding it hard to keep your resolutions, I encourage you to turn to page eight. There, you'll meet five remarkable blind veterans whose commitment to training for the London Marathon takes determination and personal growth to the next level.

The faces on the cover of this Winter edition of Debrief fill me with immense pride. They take me back to the moving experience of standing shoulder to shoulder with our blind veterans as we marched to the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. To march with a Second World War veteran, 80 years after the Armistice, was especially poignant. You can read more about how we honoured the Fallen, across the country, on page four.

One of those who marched with me, blind veteran Mark, reflected on his years of service with great affection: "It was like being in a family." His words capture beautifully the bond that unites those who have served. As you read this issue, I hope you'll feel that same spirit running through every page. What began in their military careers empowers them today.

Our veterans achieve so much that we hold regional award ceremonies to celebrate them. On page 15, you'll find highlights from our Edinburgh event – an occasion filled with pride, gratitude and recognition for everything our supporters like you make possible.

The impact of your generosity is clear when you read Stuart's story on page 10. After just a year with the charity, his life has been completely transformed. On page 14, you can meet 91-year-old Brian, who sells his handmade creations as a way of giving back for the support he's received.

Our blind veterans continue to inspire me every single day and I hope you enjoy reading about them. Whether you donate, fundraise or volunteer your time, all their achievements begin with you.

Thank you for being such an important part of the Blind Veterans UK family.

With my heartfelt thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Bell".

Adrian Bell, CEO.



Our contingent at this year's march at the Cenotaph

The nation remembers

With 80 years having passed since the end of the Second World War, this year's Remembrance commemorations were particularly poignant.

Members of our Blind Veterans UK family gathered at services around the country to pay their respects. Drawing strength from one another - and the unwavering support of people like you - they stood proud in honour of all those who gave their lives in service, ensuring that their sacrifice continues to inspire generations to come.

For some of us, Remembrance began at Hampstead Cemetery in London with a small service at the grave of our founder, Sir Arthur Pearson. That afternoon, 12 blind veterans attended the spectacular Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall.

On Remembrance Sunday, our contingent of around 80 blind veterans and guides assembled at Horse Guards Parade to take part in the televised march past the Cenotaph. Army veteran Kelly made history as the first blind veteran to lay a wreath accompanied by a guide dog, while marching alongside her was 101-year-old Michael, one of only 20 Second World War veterans in the parade this year.



104-year-old Nancy with her wreath at Rustington

At our Rustington Centre, blind veterans Nancy and John, who also served in the war, were among those who laid wreaths. The service there marked the last for Standard Bearer, Alan, who has decided to pass on the role after an impressive 10 years. We thank him for his dedication.



Standard bearer Wayne with other blind veterans standing beside the 'Victory over Blindness' statue in Manchester Piccadilly

Meanwhile, in Manchester, we held the first Remembrance Service at our Victory over Blindness statue outside Manchester Piccadilly station. The event, attended by 48 blind veterans and guests, was followed by a special dinner and many also attended the Service of Remembrance held at St Peter's Square the next day.

Over 50 wreaths were laid on behalf of our charity across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There was even a small service at Brighton railway station during which blind veterans Tony and Alan laid wreaths.

Eighty years on from the end of a war that shaped our world, we continue to remember not only those who fell, but also those who returned, rebuilt and inspired.



Blind veteran Clive laying his gifted wreath



You **honoured** and **supported** them.
Thank you for being part of Remembrance 2025.
For more stories, go to our website at blindveterans.org.uk/remembrance25



Kelly with her family ahead of Remembrance

Marching to new horizons

As a group, the blind veterans marching at the Cenotaph represent triumph over adversity. Individually, they are just as inspiring – each one a testament to the incredible impact your support makes.

Our wreath-bearer this year, Kelly, served with the Adjutant General's Corps. At just 23, she suffered a stroke, and her life changed overnight. "I lost my sight and my career," she recalls. "I was absolutely devastated, and the future was so uncertain." Thankfully, Kelly found Blind Veterans UK in 2006. She says, **"They took me in and have taken care of me ever since."**



Kelly and Archie ready to set off in London



John at Horse Guards Parade

Kelly was joined by John, who received a British Empire Medal this year for his outstanding service to his local community. It was especially meaningful for him to wear his BEM for the very first time at the march.

On the cover of this edition are blind veterans and brothers-in-arms, Bob and Peter. Peter served for 18 years with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the Territorial Army.



Blind veteran Bob at Horse Guards Parade



Blind veteran Peter at Horse Guards Parade



Blind veterans Bob and Peter at Horse Guards Parade

He lost his sight in 2020 after lockdown disrupted his access to medical treatment. “Within a week, I’d lost my sight completely,” he says. “The bottom dropped out of my world.”

He began receiving support from Blind Veterans UK in 2021. “The charity has given me the confidence to challenge myself again,” he says. “It’s all been a learning curve, and it’s thanks to their help that I keep trying.”

Peter met Bob in their hometown and introduced him to the charity. Bob served for ten years as an aircraft engineer in the RAF and lost his sight in 2019 to glaucoma.

“Blind Veterans UK has opened my world up again,” says Bob. “It’s led to opportunities that have given me something new to focus on.” He now serves on the Accessibility Committee at RAF Cosworth, advising on how to make displays and exhibitions more accessible for visually impaired visitors.

“It is an honour to have introduced Bob to the charity and to march alongside him,” says Peter, who held his late wife, Kay, in his thoughts as he marched, as well as his father – a Second World War veteran.

For Bob, Remembrance is one of the most important dates of the year. “It was an honour to walk alongside my friend Peter,” he says.

Blind Veterans show you how it's done!

Have you ever wondered what you're truly capable of? It's a question many blind veterans consider as they learn to adapt to life after sight loss. Maybe you'll be inspired by them stepping out of their comfort zones to raise money for the charity.

Meet the Fab Five!

Blind veterans Andy, Kelly, Wayne, Alan and Chris are training hard for the London Marathon, with a joint fundraising target of £1,250.

This is how much it costs for five blind veterans like them to receive a day of bespoke training session with one of our Community Support Workers or Rehabilitation Officers. These specialist staff members help our veterans to overcome the challenges of sight loss, supporting them to take on everyday tasks - and adventures - with independence and confidence.



Wayne running past the beach huts in Rustington



Alan and his guide ahead of the 2025 London Marathon

Wayne: You may remember Wayne from our Christmas appeal. This will be his first Marathon. He says, "While staying at the charity's Rustington Centre, I was asked to share some of the things I'd like to achieve that seemed out of reach to me because of my sight loss. I shared my dream of taking part in the London Marathon. The team supported my aspirations by helping me train and prepare. It's given me my independence back - and a sense of purpose."

Alan: At 24, Alan joined the Royal Navy but just three years later, a rare genetic condition took his sight and forced him to retire. He says, "I can't see people's faces properly including my own daughter's, which is heartbreaking. I can't thank Blind Veterans UK enough for their support. The London Marathon is a terrific opportunity to remind myself I can still take on big challenges and endeavours in spite of my sight loss."



Andy celebrates his 10th London Marathon

Andy: This will be Andy's 11th London Marathon. He says, "Blind Veterans UK has invested a lot of time over the years to help me rebuild my life when I'd lost all hope. They gave me the confidence to start doing physical activities again and get back to work. I hope that my experience can help other blind veterans and that as a team we can all cross the finish line and be proud of our achievements and personal journeys."



Chris in his training gear

Chris: Territorial Army veteran, Chris says, "At 35, I found out I had a hereditary eye disease. I was devastated. I'm taking on this challenge because Blind Veterans UK has been there for me. They have provided me with physical support and gadgets to help me live day-to-day life, but above all I've benefitted hugely from the camaraderie of being with others who have lost their sight and have a military background to bond over."



Kelly after her first London Marathon

Kelly: Army veteran Kelly suffered a stroke that changed her life overnight. She says, "At the age of 23, I lost my sight and my career. The charity saved my life; I owe them a great deal. I've met so many inspirational people, both my fellow blind veterans and staff who have shaped my life. It's always an honour to represent the charity and give back for the support I've had."

Inspired by our veterans? Get involved!

Access our Challenge Directory to discover challenges, for varying fitness levels, taking place across the UK and beyond. blindveterans.org.uk/challenge

To find out more about the different ways you can get involved in fundraising – as an individual, group or business – visit blindveterans.org.uk/getinvolved

Stuart's year: Small steps and giant leaps

Blind veteran Stuart took part in the South Coast Ultra on 6 September last year, covering an incredible 57km in 16 hours. It was a triumphant and emotional end to his first year of being supported by us: **"I've been given the opportunity to have my life again."**

For Stuart, 51, completing the South Coast Ultra felt nothing short of a miracle. When he first came to us a year earlier, he couldn't even make himself a cup of coffee. A former sapper in the Royal Engineers, Stuart suffered a catastrophic respiratory arrest a few years after being medically discharged from service. His brain had been starved of oxygen, leaving him without sight.

The prognosis was so grim that doctors even considered turning off his life support. Stuart went on to spend three years in hospital, initially in an induced coma.

"Three years is a long time to have been out of the world. My ethos now is to seize every opportunity that comes my way, and I felt proud to be walking with my fellow blind veterans."

"When I discovered that my sight loss was not fixable, I had two choices: not having a life, or taking life by the horns," he says. Stuart chose the latter - and what a year it's been. He has scuba-dived, climbed, abseiled, gone white water rafting, learned to cook again, driven a car around Brands Hatch, and even taken up horse riding.



Your support has given Stu his smile back

In preparation for the South Coast Ultra, Stuart joined a special training week at our Rustington Centre, building his fitness and resilience for the mammoth challenge ahead. He knew it would be tough, but he was determined to finish - "even if I have to crawl over the line on my hands and knees."

As his first year as a blind veteran draws to a close, Stuart reflects on how far he's come in such a short time. "I proved to myself that sight loss is not going to stop me living my life." He is so grateful to you for caring and for supporting him.

So far, Stuart has raised over £7,000 for the charity - with donations still coming in. "The support I've had from Blind Veterans UK has been nothing short of phenomenal. I've achieved so much, and I want to give back to the charity."

Last year, we began supporting 447 new blind veterans



Inspired to give back – Brian’s creations

Your support provides a level of specialist care that many blind veterans say they cannot find elsewhere. Our blend of sight loss expertise and deep insight into the experiences of those who have served is unmatched.

For over a decade, David has been a lifeline for blind veterans in his local area. As a Community Support Worker (CSW) with Blind Veterans UK, he’s witnessed countless sight loss journeys - each one unique and deeply personal. His role goes far beyond offering advice or equipment; it’s about building trust, opening doors and helping veterans access the support they need to live full, independent lives.

David explains, “Blind Veterans UK offers a personalised service, one that works around beneficiaries’ lives.” To show the impact of his work, David recently filmed a short video while visiting Ken, a veteran he’s supported for more than ten years. Like many of our veterans, Ken is fiercely independent. Accepting help doesn’t come easily, which is why building trust and creating a personal connection is so important.



Blind veteran Ken and CSW David

On this visit, Ken confided in David about challenges he’d been too proud to admit to anyone else. With David’s guidance and a referral to our Rehabilitation Team, Ken received mobility support that now helps him feel safe at home while maintaining his independence.

David knows that sight loss is only ever part of the story. Behind every veteran’s experience are other factors that shape their lives – mobility, mental health, and, perhaps most importantly, the challenge of accepting support after a lifetime of military pride.

This is what makes CSWs like David so vital. They bring expert knowledge, years of experience, and a deep understanding of local services. Combined with their appreciation of each veteran’s service, they create a stronger, more connected support network for blind veterans.

David says, “If I was just a faceless individual on the end of the phone, people wouldn’t open up to me the way they do – and they’d miss out on vital support. **I’m hugely proud of my role and the work we do.**”

You can hear more about David’s incredible work in his short video – a powerful reminder of the difference your support makes. Visit blindveterans.org.uk/openingdoors

Steve helps us to remember

Our amazing supporters help the charity in so many ways. Steve volunteers his time to lovingly maintain the graves in our cemetery.



Steve, veteran of the Royal Green Jackets

A veteran of the 3rd Battalion Royal Green Jackets, Steve first noticed how neglected some of the graves in his local churchyard were during a christening. He explains, "There was a war grave of a young rifleman who'd died aged 18, just six weeks before the Armistice. He was from my antecedent regiment, the Rifle Brigade. It spurred me on to say, why is it like that?"

That moment inspired Steve. Over the following years, he taught himself the craft of stone masonry - learning how to repair, clean, and paint graves, and which materials to use. **"To date, I've cleaned about 1,300 graves, 30 memorials and 20 statues."**

When Steve came across some graves belonging to blind veterans in need of care, he reached out to our Centre. **"I said, 'I'd like to help you do this.'"** Now, every year, Steve returns to maintain the memorial and all 229 headstones in our cemetery. "I love it. I just think it's showing respect to these poor guys. It's not right for them to lie there dirty."

Steve was also invited to restore the grave of our founder, Sir Arthur Pearson. After researching Sir Arthur's story, Steve was deeply moved. "What an amazing man he was."

Sir Arthur's grave in London's Hampstead was difficult to clean at first, but Steve did a wonderful job and now visits annually to tend it before Remembrance. "I'm in awe of that man. Unbelievable man. Amazing."



The grave of RAF veteran Ron Freer, expertly cleaned by Steve.

Ron Freer was a Second World War veteran. The terrible treatment he received in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp caused him to go completely blind. He was supported by Blind Veterans UK for more than 70 years, until he died in 2020 aged 104. We are incredibly grateful to Steve for giving Ron's final resting place the respect it deserves.

Find out more about Steve at [blindveterans.org.uk/gravere storing](https://blindveterans.org.uk/gravere-storing)

Every hero deserves a friend



Colin is comforted by music

Could you be part of the amazing difference our volunteers make to the lives of blind veterans?

November was a busy month at Blind Veterans UK! We also celebrated Befriending Week - a chance to highlight the power of human kindness and the transformative impact that befriending roles such as home visiting and telephone befriending can have.

These roles may seem simple on the surface - a chat over a cup of tea, a weekly phone call - but for our blind veterans, they can be life-changing. Many of our veterans live alone, and sight loss can make isolation even more profound. Befrienders offer more than conversation; they offer consistency, empathy, and a vital link to the outside world.

Home visitors bring warmth and companionship directly into veterans' homes. Whether it's sharing stories or simply being a friendly face, these visits often become the highlight of a veteran's week.

Telephone befrienders, meanwhile, offer regular check-ins and meaningful conversations that lift spirits and reduce loneliness - especially for those living in remote areas or facing mobility challenges.

Volunteer Coordinator Laura perfectly embodies the heart and creativity behind our befriending programme. When asked to find a befriender for Colin, one of our blind veterans living with dementia, Laura rose to the challenge. Colin finds speech difficult, but as a former band leader, he lights up when playing the trumpet.

Laura didn't just find a volunteer - she found a music teacher experienced in working with people living with dementia. Through music, Colin rediscovered joy, expression, and companionship. It's a powerful reminder that befriending isn't one-size-fits-all - it's about meeting people where they are and finding the spark that brings them to life.



Have you considered volunteering?

Whether you can spare an hour a week or a few hours a month, your time could make a world of difference to someone who served their country and now needs your support. To learn more or get involved, reach out to us at blindveterans.org.uk/volunteering.

Inspired to give back - Brian's creations

Royal Navy veteran Brian has been supported by Blind Veterans UK for over seven years. He has received help in many different ways to manage his sight loss.



Brian is grateful he can be creative again

Training sessions at our Centre have helped Brian make the most of technology such as his iPad, which now keeps him organised at home. More recently, one of our Rehabilitation Officers visited him at home to help build his confidence using kitchen equipment, enabling him to continue cooking independently.

With just a few adjustments, Brian now confidently uses a microwave - allowing him to prepare meals to share with fellow veterans at community meet-ups. He says the support from Blind Veterans UK has been "brilliant, every time."

Now 91, Brian finds it more important than ever to stay active and engaged. One of the things he enjoys most is receiving monthly craft kits from our National Creative Project. This initiative helps blind veterans rediscover hobbies they may have given up due to sight loss. The accessible kits are delivered straight to their homes, allowing veterans like Brian to enjoy creative activities that bring both joy and purpose.

Brian loves these craft projects so much that he's taken them a step further. He now designs and creates his own items to sell and donate the proceeds back to the charity. Grateful for the support he's received, Brian wanted to do what he could to give back.



Proud Brian's bracelets

Drawing on his sailor's knot skills from his Navy days, he crafts beautiful bracelets. It's extra special to see his Royal Navy past reflected in his creations. He also makes wooden bird boxes, using bright colours to make them easier to see. "The charity has been terrific," Brian says. "I've had a lot of support - that's why I wanted to give something back."

Thanks to supporters like you, Brian can continue channelling his inner sailor - doing what he loves while helping others in the process. We think he's truly amazing!



Last year, our National Creative Project delivered over 1,800 kits.

Honouring heroes: Edinburgh salutes them

Conversation, laughter and music filled the room as blind veterans, volunteers, carers and staff gathered for a special celebration at the Royal Scots Club in Edinburgh.

We host events like this across the country. Each one offers blind veterans the opportunity to come together, share their stories, and reconnect with the military community. The highlight of the Edinburgh evening was the awards ceremony - a moving occasion to celebrate several remarkable guests and the extraordinary achievements made possible by your generous support.

Earlier this year, blind veteran Chris proudly graduated from the University of York - wearing his Blind Veterans UK tie. Chris had set himself the challenge of completing a degree in Human Evolution. And it wasn't easy. With the support of our Rehabilitation Team - including specialist note-taking materials - he had to completely adapt the way in which he studied and wrote. Proud Chris received our Outstanding Achievement Award, recognising his success.

When blind veteran Niall joined us just over a year ago, he was struggling to adapt to life with sight loss. A week at our Centre introduced him to new activities - including golf - which quickly became his passion. Today, Niall plays regularly with Blind Golf Scotland and competes in events across the country. He received our Sporting Award, celebrating how much he has overcome and achieved.

Every blind veteran, volunteer and carer recognised on the day reflects the strength, compassion and spirit of our community in Scotland and Northern Ireland.



Barry and Lauren with her award

When Barry was first matched with volunteer Lauren as his outings companion, he was nervous. It had been a long time since he'd ventured out after losing his wife. But from their very first trip, the pair clicked and they have shared more than 20 visits to museums and heritage sites across Scotland. Last November, Lauren even supported Barry on a deeply personal visit to his wife's grave on the anniversary of her passing.

Barry nominated Lauren for the Volunteers Award.



Last year, over 300 beneficiaries attended 14 military events.

Walking tall again - cane training gives Martin confidence

For Royal Air Force veteran Martin, walking tall and proud had once been second nature. But two years ago, as his eyesight began to deteriorate rapidly, he noticed himself hunching over, constantly looking down to watch his feet. **His confidence was in tatters.**

Martin had been issued a symbol cane by social services but it wasn't the answer. Everything changed when he met Sarah, his Support Worker, and Jayne, a Rehabilitation Officer from Blind Veterans UK.

Together, they worked with Martin to help him regain his independence - not just by providing a long cane, but by giving him the training and encouragement to use it confidently. "Sarah and Jayne, they've done marvels," Martin says. "I cannot thank them enough."

Through cane training, Martin learned the essential skills to walk safely and independently. He practised how to hold the cane correctly, use the ball tip to detect obstacles, navigate stairs, and cross roads with curbs. "They really did do a terrific job," he says.



Jayne and blind veteran Martin

Now, Martin walks upright and with confidence - just as he did in the RAF. He's able to make his way to the local supermarket on his own, trusting his cane to guide him and signal to others to give him space.

"I know how to use it properly. I'm so relaxed with it now - I don't go out without my cane. I think it's brilliant, I really do."

Losing his sight meant Martin had to give up his driving licence, something he found particularly difficult. But cane training has helped him reclaim the independence he thought he'd lost.

"Even if it's just a short walk somewhere locally, it's a big difference from being trapped inside your home."

Martin now proudly tells others about the support he's received. "I tell everyone when I'm going around how brilliant Blind Veterans UK has been."

For £40 you can provide a blind veteran with a long cane – and their freedom.



Anyone can guide!

Knowing how to guide someone with sight loss is a skill that can make a real difference - and it's easier than you might think.

By following these instructions, you'll feel more confident and empowered to offer help to a friend, colleague, or stranger, in a way that's respectful and safe.



Step 1

Introduce yourself

Approach the person (if it's a stranger) and ask if they'd like you to guide them.



Step 2

Ask how they'd like to be guided

If they say they would then simply ask how they'd like to be guided and where they're going.



Step 3

Let them hold your arm

Rather than grab their arm to guide them, ask if they'd like to hold your arm or shoulder.



Step 4

Look out for hazards

Tell them when you approach any obstacles, such as kerbs and steps, and explain where they are.



Step 5

Help them to sit down

If you're guiding someone to a seat, put their hand on the back of the chair so they can orientate themselves before they sit down.



Step 6

Tell them you're leaving

Don't just walk off. Once you've taken the person to where they want to go, tell them you're leaving before you move away.

For more tips, please go to blindveterans.org/resources
From finances and holidays to air fryers and iPhones, you'll find a wealth of sight loss-related information.



A family's full circle: From supported to supporting

Second World War veteran Claude joined what was then St Dunstan's in 1948. Vibration from the guns had caused his retinas to split, leaving him with just peripheral vision.

The care he received from the charity made such a difference to his family that Claude's granddaughter, Tina, wants to honour her family's long history with Blind Veterans UK by leaving a gift in her Will. Here, Tina shares her family's remarkable history with the charity.



Blind veteran Claude in his uniform



Claude with his wife, Adelaide and daughter, Christine

A gunner in the British Army, Claude left his wife Adelaide and one year old daughter - Tina's mother, Christine - behind in Wakefield to serve his country. When he returned home in 1945, the family hoped life would return to normal. But the damage to his eyesight was permanent.

As his vision failed, life became very difficult. How would he provide for the family?

Tina explains: "Things progressively got worse, and it started to become difficult for Grandad to work. He and Nana started to worry for the future. Then in 1948, someone recommended that he sought assistance from Blind Veterans UK - St Dunstan's as they were then. Thank goodness for them".

That moment changed everything. The charity offered Claude and his young family a home, a place of their own when they had nowhere to go. He was given equipment, as well as training, to become independent again.

Tina says, "The charity even supported my family to have chickens, which meant that they could sell the eggs. They felt so lucky."

Most significantly, Claude was introduced to other blind veterans and became part of the Blind Veterans UK family and community. His new friends showed him that there was life after sight loss and Claude regained his sense of hope. Following his rehabilitation and with his new connections, Claude went on to live a life of fulfilment. He even discovered a passion for chess which led him to compete in tournaments. Claude was part of this charity until he sadly died in 1975. Blind Veterans UK remained in touch with Tina's family, supporting her grandmother after Claude's death.

"The care and support continued even after losing Grandad," Tina remembers. "My mum and I decided that a gift should be left to Blind Veterans UK on behalf of the whole family. It feels right that other blind veterans should benefit, just as my family did, as though things have gone full circle. I have therefore pledged a gift in my Will to support future blind veterans."



Christine eating a biscuit, using the tray made by her father, Claude, during his time with Blind Veterans UK

We are enormously grateful to Tina and her family for their support in this special way. Gifts in Wills are crucial for ensuring that we can provide lifelong support to blind veterans and be there whenever they need us.

If you plan to leave a gift in your Will to support blind veterans into the future, you are doing something very special. Just like Tina, you're securing independence and fulfilling lives for blind veterans for many years to come. Thank you.



Tina and her mother Christine

To find out more about leaving a gift, phone Alice on **020 7616 7923**, email giftsinwills@blindveterans.org.uk, or visit blindveterans.org.uk/leaveagift.

Enter the New Year Raffle

You could WIN

£15,000

Tickets cost £1
and help to rebuild blind veterans' lives



Phone **0300 111 2233**

Play online raffle.blindveterans.org.uk/debrief

Raffle closes 20 March. Draw takes place 27 March.

No under 18 allowed to enter. No prizes will be paid to anyone under 18 years of age. Full terms and conditions apply, please visit raffle.blindveterans.org.uk/rules for more details.



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