

by Nicola Hudson – PR and Communications Officer

VETERAN

VOICES



» A ground-breaking film project between Combat Stress and reminiscence charity Age Exchange has led to more than 60 veterans sharing powerful stories of military service, combat, the impact on their mental health and life after leaving the forces.

In 2018, we were approached by David Savill, Artistic Director at Age Exchange, a reminiscence charity, about collaborating on a project to mark our Centenary. Now, with a really remarkable film that takes a frank and unashamed look at what serving in – and coming out of – the armed forces really means to veterans, we've seen this project have an extraordinary impact on everyone.



“

Chatting on a film that might end up in a museum one day has been incredible. If I can help anyone, even just one person who thinks 'I feel like that' and they come and get help, then it's been worth it.”

Davina, veteran volunteer interviewer

Combat Stress 100

The result of this collaboration is a remarkable film and archive – Combat Stress 100 – in which veterans from a wide range of conflicts talk about their time in service, their experience of combat and the various ways they have coped with the personal difficulties their experiences have raised.

Fifty hours of footage were recorded from more than 70 interviews with veterans and Combat Stress staff.

The interviews took place across the UK in locations ranging from Queen's University, Belfast to the St. Helen's Rugby League Club in Merseyside. All the interviews were carried out by Combat Stress veterans, who received training from Age Exchange in interview and filming techniques, and who travelled the country meeting veterans like themselves. All spoke candidly about their experiences.

The archive, available soon on the Combat Stress website, will be accessible to current and future veterans and their families seeking mental health support.

The film had its first screening at the National Museum of Liverpool in November 2019 as part of their Armistice commemoration. It's had several other showings since then, and you can catch it throughout the year as we take it on a tour around the country. For the latest list of screenings visit our website combatstress.org.uk

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They gave profoundly moving accounts of their experiences of being deployed to war zones, the devastating impact on their mental health and their courage and determination to rebuild their lives.”

Nicola Hudson,
Combat Stress

The power of speaking aloud

For many of the veterans we interviewed, this marked the first time they had spoken out publicly about their experiences. Talking to other veterans helped to build a bond that enabled trust and sharing, and interviewees moved from being nervous of the camera to just talking very naturally – and movingly – about their struggles and how they managed difficult times.



Urging others to get help

Of the veterans who shared their stories, many talked about the impact that working with Combat Stress had on their lives, and encouraged anyone who recognised what they were talking about to get help too.

David, a veteran interviewee, said: “When I self-referred to Combat Stress I was desperate. I had no-one else. I had nothing else to turn to. I think things are pretty highly likely that I wouldn’t be here today if Combat Stress hadn’t been there. A while ago, in my darker moments, I had such a specific [suicide] plan that I was walking around with a letter for the coroner, explaining what had happened. I don’t have that letter any more, thank goodness. I don’t carry it because I’m not in such a dark place.”



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David, veteran interviewee



PTSD is one of the worst things you can have. The other day, a little girl fell over and burst out crying. Just that one trigger – a screaming kid – took me straight back to combat. I was straight up into survival mode. It took me six days to calm down.”

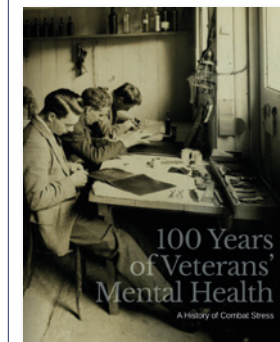
Brian, veteran interviewee

100 years of veterans’ mental health

We have published a history of Combat Stress to mark 100 years of supporting veterans’ mental health. *A Hundred Years of Veterans’ Mental Health: A History of Combat Stress* has been compiled by Dr. Rachel Duffet, an expert in the social history of war in twentieth century Britain.

It is a fascinating insight into the original need for Combat Stress and the pioneering work we have done to support veterans from all conflicts who struggle with mental health issues.

You can buy the book from our online shop for just £10 combatstress.org.uk/shop



CAN YOU SUPPORT OUR LIFE-CHANGING WORK?
A donation today will help us provide our vital services to veterans.
Call us on **01372 587 151**, or visit combatstress.org.uk/donate

COMBAT STRESS 100

50



Hours of footage recorded

70



Veteran interviews

800



Limited edition history books printed as part of the project