

45) ARMS SERVICE PROJECT - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

Am I alone in thinking that we have possibly become a bit too risk-averse nowadays? A couple of things brought this to mind this week and the first involved the weekly shop. Liz was emptying numerous (suitably green) shopping bags whilst I watched carefully in the hope that there might be the odd treat for me. I was delighted when I saw her opening a packet of salmon fillets and I eyed them hungrily, only to be told that they were actually for the cats, as a birthday treat, and not for me. As I grumpily went to chuck the empty packet into the (recycling) bin, whilst passing a gratuitous remark relating to how unusual it was for an island girl to be in possession of a salmon with no visible net marks on it, I could not help but notice that the packet carried a dire warning – “Salmon – contains fish”. Well, I would sincerely hope so. What else would it contain? Beefburgers? Have we really reached the point that we need to explain that salmon are in fact fish? To add to my grumpy mood I went to buy my poppy from a stand manned by two respected local veterans and found that one is not allowed to buy a poppy with a pin attached in case one pricks one’s delicate pinkie. If you want a pin then there are some on the table but you have to get one yourself - to avoid a possible claim presumably. Honestly, I despair.

Which leads me very neatly to today’s subject. This is Remembrance Sunday and it is indeed time to remember the men and women who have given their lives in the service of their country, and indeed those who have suffered life-changing injuries, both mental and physical, and it is also a time to give them the help and support which they so greatly deserve. It seems to me that there is often much enthusiasm amongst politicians for sending servicemen and women off to war, but considerably less thought given to looking after them when, and if, they return and it is often left to charities to provide a lot of the support that is needed. The Royal British Legion, in all parts of the UK do a fine job, as do many other groups, but CAB also believe strongly that we too should play a significant part, and we do. We are now delivering a service called ASAP – Armed Services Advice Project – with support and funding from Poppy Scotland, ABF The Soldier’s Charity, The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, Seafarers UK, SSAFA and The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity. We provide support, advice and guidance to members of the Armed Forces Community across Scotland – serving, ex-service, regular, reserve or dependants (and widows or widowers). Whatever part of the community you are, ASAP can and will help. And if you have served as a member of the Merchant Navy in a commercial vessel in support of UK military operations – or are a dependent – then you too are very welcome. We can give you information, advice and support on a wide range of subjects including: Benefits; Debt and money Advice; Housing; Work related problems; Consumer issues; Relationships, and indeed on any subject with which you need help. And, as always, all the information and advice is supplied free and in total confidence. You can call ASAP free on 0808 800 1007 and talk to one of our trained advisers, visit us at Wick or Thurso CAB,

or ask ASAP to contact you by filling in the on-line contact form at www.asapadvice.org.uk. And, as always, if you go to <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/> and type in "Armed Forces" you will find a very large quantity of useful information which you will find useful.

And if you are an older veteran the excellent service provided by "Unforgotten Forces" is also available to you – Unforgotten Forces is a partnership between 15 leading organisations which will deliver a range of new services and enhancements for older veterans living in Scotland. These services will cover areas such as advice, access to healthcare, social isolation, and respite, along with creative activities and events for those in care settings. Citizens Advice Scotland is pleased to be part of this consortium through the Armed Services Advice Project and we will happily put you in touch

Unfortunately, many service people encounter a lot of problems when they go back into civvy street. Post-traumatic stress disorder is very common and, sadly, many veterans suffer from mental health issues or struggle to cope with the effects of physical injury and many end up homeless and on the streets. So what can we do locally? For a start there is often confusion over who is classed as a veteran, but the definition is quite simple - the term "veteran" covers anyone who has at any time served in the UK armed forces, including those who did National Service (and there are still a lot of people in Caithness who fit that category). No minimum age or length of service is required and it is not necessary to have been on active service. Widows, widowers and dependants of veterans are part of the 'veteran community', along with qualifying Merchant Sailors. We can help with •finding employment following discharge from the armed forces •homelessness and other housing problems •welfare benefits, including pensions and war disablement pensions •help in dealing with medical problems, including mental health problems, or in dealing with a disability caused by service in the armed forces •help in claiming compensation for illness or injury sustained as a result of service in the armed forces •help in tracing service records or claiming campaign medals •help with visiting battlefields and war cemeteries •help with education and vocational training. And those are just the basics. And do not forget that from 8 April 2013, service personnel and veterans awarded a Guaranteed Income Payment of 50% or more under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) will be eligible for Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) which is paid at a flat rate equivalent to the enhanced rates of both components of Personal Independence Payment (PIP). AFIP is not means tested and is not taxable. It provides access to disability premiums payable with other DWP benefits, as well as access to other schemes such as Motability. However, it also has certain advantages over "civvy" PIP - • it is awarded for life •is not subject to review or further medical assessments •will not be stopped when the claimant is in hospital (except the Royal Chelsea Hospital), a care home or prison •is payable anywhere in the world. This is excellent and we would be delighted to help veterans to claim it – they deserve it.

As you can see the support is there and both CCAB and our valued partners will be very happy to provide it. And if you know of someone who fits the criteria, but who may be too unwell to get in touch with us then please let us know and we will give you the information to give to them. Even today we are sometimes honoured to be able to help WW2 survivors as well as Falklands veterans and many others so please let us know if we can help.

And now I shall apply my poppy – with a large and dangerous pin of which the nanny state would disapprove - whilst I go and pay tribute at the war memorial