



Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

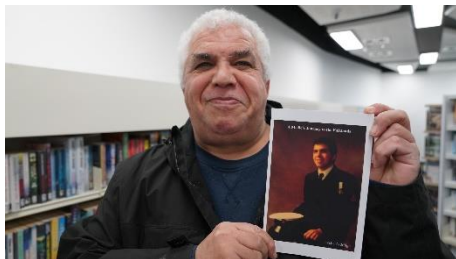
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National Storytelling Week: Falklands veteran pens memoir with support from a phone buddy service

A Falklands War medic has praised Royal Star & Garter's Telephone Friendship Service available to the Armed Forces community for "giving him his voice back", following the launch of his autobiography.

Leslie Aldridge's story is being highlighted as part of Royal Star & Garter's focus on providing a platform for veterans using its services.

Les said the charity's Telephone Friendship Service had helped boost his confidence, following the publication of his book, 'A Medic's Journey to the Falklands'.



Les with his memoir

The Telephone Friendship Service is a nationwide service run by veterans' charity Royal Star & Garter, and is free to the user. Its trained volunteers call veterans and veterans' partners, providing friendly conversation and wellbeing support.

Les was speaking ahead of National Storytelling Week, which runs from 1-9 February.

The 64-year-old's memoir covers his time as a nurse on the hospital ship SS Uganda, which was positioned near the Falkland Islands and helped treat casualties from the war. It also looks at his difficult upbringing, in which he was given up for adoption at the age of three months, and cared for by Barnardo's children's charity until he was fostered at eight.

During an eight-week period in 1982, Les worked on the burns unit of the SS Uganda, where he treated severely injured casualties from ships including the HMS Sheffield, RFA Sir Tristram and RFA Sir Galahad. The horrific scenes he witnessed stayed with him for life, and led to Les developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which has had a lasting impact on his life.

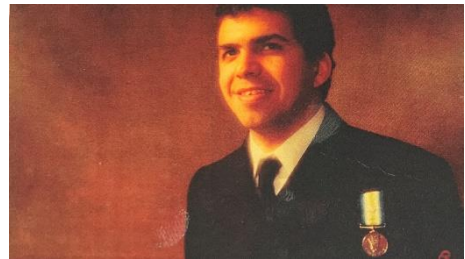


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Les left the Navy in 1991 and went on to work in hospitals, but the effects of his PTSD has meant he has been unable to work for the past four years. It left Les, who lives on his own, feeling depressed and deeply unhappy.

However, he was recommended to the Telephone Friendship Service, soon after it was launched in 2023, by Veterans UK. He said it was a catalyst to bring meaning and wellbeing back into his life: "I think it has given me confidence, it certainly gave me the confidence to write my book. Having someone to talk to, to bounce ideas off and to have a chat with, gives me comfort and support. It gives me companionship."



Les served as a nurse in the Navy

Les started writing his book in 2024 with the help of creative writing project Write-London, and finished it in six months. He said: "I wrote it for my 14-year-old son, so that he could read about my life and what I have been through. I really enjoyed writing it, it was therapy for me and I'm looking forward to writing more books in the future."

Speaking about his book's launch on 8 January, Les added: "It was a proud moment for me, to come so far after I'd been so down. And I wanted the launch to reflect and thank all the people and groups and organisations that have been there to help and support me – the NHS, Write-London, and Royal Star & Garter. Their fantastic Telephone Friendship Service has enabled me to prosper in my outlook, and I think it's terrific. I would urge anyone considering using it to give it a try."

Royal Star & Garter provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners, living with disability or dementia from Homes in Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe. As well as Telephone Friendship Service, it also has other services reaching out into the community, including Lunch Club and Day Care, which address isolation and loneliness.



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Anyone who thinks they could benefit from Telephone Friendship Service, or wants more information about being a volunteer, can go to <https://starandgarter.org/telephone-friendship/>

A Medic's Journey to the Falklands is available online from all good book shops.

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About Royal Star & Garter

Founded in 1916, Royal Star & Garter is a charity which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their families living with disability or dementia, and has three Homes in Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe. It has also launched services reaching out into the community including Lunch Clubs, Day Care and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

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Royal Star & Garter
is a member of the
National Care Forum