

Celebrating Service

A Happy Military Veterans Day in East Kent

Article and photos: Derek Lindars



Veterans and guests dining in the grand marquee

On a warm but windy summer's day in Upchurch, near Sittingbourne, the Province of East Kent and the Not Forgotten charity joined forces on 13th July to host a memorable Military Veterans Day. The Barnyard, nestled amidst Kent's rolling countryside, provided the perfect setting for a 'garden party' themed lunch in a beautiful marquee, to be attended by around 130 veterans.

Volunteers worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure every detail was thoughtfully arranged, including the positioning of military vehicles from the car park to the marquee. At midday, as veterans arrived they were greeted with warm smiles and, as an appetizer, soft drinks, sparkling wine and canapes. The sound of conversation soon filled the marquee as everyone took the opportunity to mingle and reminisce about their military service.

Many dignitaries attended including:

- The Provincial Grand Master, Neil Hamilton Johnstone;
- The Armed Forces Covenant lead for Region 8, Assistant Provincial Grand Master of West Kent, Dan Unthank;
- The Grand Master Representative for the Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons, Mary Spillane-Tuck;
- The Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Brigadier Peter Gilbert;
- Members of the Royal British Veterans Enterprise; and,
- local Councillors.

The presence of these distinguished guests underscored the importance of the occasion and the collective commitment to supporting those who have served.

Prior to lunch being served, the Corps of Drums of the Royal Marines Cadets delivered an impressive display of drum beatings. With precision, discipline, and a striking sense of rhythm, the young cadets showcased both their musical skill and their deep commitment to tradition. Their youthful energy, combined with a level of professionalism well beyond their years, served as a timely reminder of the enduring values and heritage of military service. Their performance inspired applause and pride, after which everyone took their seats for lunch.



The Provincial Grand Master, Neil Hamilton Johnstone, welcomes the veterans and guests

Celebrating Service cont...

Alyson Smith, Community Fundraising and Development Manager for the Not Forgotten, welcomed everyone and outlined the proceedings for the day. Alyson then invited the Provincial Grand Master, Neil Hamilton Johnstone, to address the assembled guests.

Right Worshipful Brother Neil spoke passionately about the importance of the day and the Province of East Kent's unwavering commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. He went on to thank his team for their hard work before inviting the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Brigadier Peter Gilbert, to speak.



Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Brigadier Peter Gilbert

Brigadier Peter Gilbert delivered a poignant insight into his own experiences in military service, sharing personal reflections to highlight the vital importance of The Not Forgotten Charity. His remarks illustrated the challenges that veterans and serving personnel often face, underlining why ongoing support from organisations such as Not Forgotten is essential. Bringing his remarks to a close, Brigadier Gilbert introduced the afternoon's entertainers, Annie and Lloyd, who were warmly welcomed.



Entertainers, Annie and Lloyd



Worshipful Brother Graham Dear MBE RVM (Right) talking to veterans

The garden party was not just a celebration but also an opportunity to raise vital funds for veterans' causes and before lunch was served, attendees enthusiastically took part in the lively "Heads and Tails" game, a favourite at such gatherings.



Veterans and guests playing 'heads and tails'

The worthy winner of the game and last man standing was former Royal Marine and Falklands Conflict veteran, Chris Falke. Brother Chris, himself an East Kent Freemason, has gone on to put his military experience to good use and is now an Instructor for the Royal Marines Cadets and was today supervising the Cadets who performed the drum display.

Celebrating Service cont...



Chris Falke taking a bow having won 'heads and tail'

During lunch, under the auspices of Worshipful Brother Ivor Whinham, raffle tickets were sold to raise funds for the Not Forgotten charity. The generosity of guests could not be overstated and the tickets sold quickly in anticipation of the raffle to be drawn at the end of the afternoon.

The Not Forgotten Charity boasts a distinguished history, having been founded in 1920 with the aim of supporting veterans returning from the First World War. Over the decades, its mission remains steadfast: to transform the lives of veterans and serving members of the military who are confronted by injury, illness, or isolation.

Reflecting on the afternoon's event, Alyson Smith highlighted the significance of the partnership between Not Forgotten and the Freemasons. She noted that this strategic collaboration brings a unique synergy, enabling both organisations to more effectively achieve their shared objective of supporting the veteran community.



Royal Marines Cadets entertaining all with Drum Beatings



Assistant Provincial Grand Master, Trevor Carter, with veterans and guests'

This view was reinforced by Assistant Provincial Grand Master, Wayne Smith, who serves as the Province's lead for the Armed Forces Covenant. Worshipful Brother Wayne expressed his pleasure at being invited to collaborate with the Not Forgotten charity. He emphasised that, in addition to the ongoing support for Cadet units, the Province regards this partnership with the Not Forgotten as equally vital. His remarks underscored the shared commitment to honouring and assisting both veterans and those currently serving, highlighting the role that such collaborations play in sustaining meaningful support for the Armed Forces community.



Nicola and Sue showing off the cakes on offer

Celebrating Service cont...

With lunch concluded and the bar open, the atmosphere was set for a lively afternoon. Annie and Lloyd took to the stage, delivering an engaging performance of songs that captivated the guests. Their music proved irresistible and with only a hint of encouragement, guests enthusiastically made their way to the dance floor, eager to make the most of the entertainment and enjoy the friendship of the gathering.

As the afternoon drew to a close, the raffle was drawn to cheers and applause for the worthy winners. The announcement that the raffle, Heads & Tails competition and donations raised a magnificent £5,070.10 for the Not Forgotten charity was met with enthusiastic approval from all present, reflecting the generosity of those in attendance.



Kemsely Whittlesea, Paul Gear and guests



Worshipful Brother Mike Salter presenting a cheque to Alyson Smith of the Not Forgotten



The Provincial Grand Master with his Deputy and Assistant Provincial Grand Masters

But, the charitable spirit did not end there. In a particularly moving moment, Worshipful Brother Mike Salter, representing the Combined Services Lodge 10038, and with match funding from the East Kent Cornwallis Freemasons Charity, stepped forward to present a cheque for £3,500 to Alyson Smith, further boosting the funds for the Not Forgotten charity. This significant contribution underscored the collective dedication to supporting veterans and serving members of the Armed Forces.



The Provincial Executive and guests

To bring the afternoon's festivities to a memorable close, the Royal Marines Cadets Drum Corps delivered another spirited performance. Their rousing display provided a fitting finale, ensuring that everyone departed with a sense of enjoyment and belonging, having spent a most pleasurable day in the company of fellow veterans.