

My Legion

The Chief Executive of **Hilary Meredith Solicitors** is also the National Chair of The Royal British Legion Solicitors Group, and a long-term ally of and fundraiser for the Charity



“I brought the first ever case on behalf of a widow whose husband had been killed overseas”

» I have been representing military personnel and their families for over 27 years. They are a very special sector to act for and many have remained firm friends long after we have provided legal advice. I still receive Christmas cards with family updates from those I represented over 15 years ago – it’s lovely to know we have built a special rapport.

» My earliest memory of wearing a poppy was at school, we all brought in our pennies to buy a poppy which we treasured; I don’t think we fully appreciated why we were wearing them though. With Brownies and the Girl Guides, I also attended Remembrance Sunday in my home town of Knutsford in Cheshire. By then we had learnt in history lessons about Patten and his men being billeted in Knutsford during the War; the local pub still has pictures of him eating there. I have also been very privileged to twice attend the Albert Hall for the Festival of Remembrance; it’s extremely moving.

» In 1987, the law changed so that the Ministry of Defence owed a Duty of Care to all those in service, including service families. I brought the first ever case on behalf of a widow whose husband had been killed overseas and she wanted to know why and how this had happened. We eventually discovered the full circumstances but also claimed for the dependency of her and her two young children. That case changed my legal career as I was then inundated with requests from widows just wanting answers; it was through this work that I learnt about the Royal British Legion and the fantastic work they do for the serving and ex-serving community and their families. I wanted to contribute and give something back so my Law Firm continually supports and fundraises for the Charity.

» On the whole, military personnel and their families are very well looked after and certainly things have improved since I first started doing this work all those years ago. I suspect that the MoD found it hard to be open to public scrutiny and especially for civilian lawyers to ask questions. In my own experience, it’s only when something goes wrong, and families want answers which aren’t as forthcoming as they should be, that there are problems.

» Military personnel and their families are a breed apart from the rest of us, hugely inspiring and so brave – and I am talking about military wives as well here. I don’t know if I could cope with having a loved one leave to fight in areas of conflict and the constant worry.

» The Legion acts not only for serving personnel but also veterans and their families. It undertakes so much work, more than any other charity in my view. It not only assists with finance but is funding research into such problems as blast injuries. I wonder, post-Afghanistan, if many of the current newer charities will survive but the Legion has been around for over 90 years with the Queen as its Patron, it’s a British institution and has helped countless numbers during its existence. The poppy logo is recognised worldwide, too, a major brand achievement.

» We started the RBL Solicitors Group in around 1990 with a group of like-minded lawyers, some ex-military but all with a passion to assist the Armed Forces and their families – by providing the best legal advice but also to assist in regaining quality of life post-injury. We share information between ourselves and the Legion. We have covered incidents from Northern Ireland to Bosnia, Gulf War 1 Iraq and Afghanistan but also accidents on manoeuvres from jungle training in Belize to South China, Hong Kong, Kenya, Cyprus, Germany and Canada. Each case is different and each client has their own unique difficulties to overcome which we recognise.

We also work closely with the Independent Inquest Unit who do a marvellous job supporting service families in a time of desperate need. Facing a military inquest on your own is daunting and the IIA and the RBLSG provide free assistance to service families should they ever require our help.

Can the Legion help you?

If you’re facing a Service inquiry and inquest, our Independent Inquest Advice service provides free, expert legal advice and assistance. For details, visit: www.britishlegion.org.uk