

Jobs for the boys



Many wounded ex-servicemen would make superb greenkeepers, and the **On-Course Foundation** is helping to put them in touch with golf clubs, and will assist in finding them employment within the golf industry.

Scott MacCallum met one who more than deserves a chance...



ON COURSE
FOUNDATION

It has been an all too common item on our news bulletins over the last few years when we are told of another casualty from Afghanistan or are shown moving footage of the residents of Wootten Bassett paying tribute to another fallen warrior.

What is not so publicly recorded is the return home of those who are badly wounded while serving.

These include many young men and women who will never be the same again following their experiences in the service of Queen and country. Many have been permanently scarred or lost limbs yet they still have the largest part of their lives stretching ahead of them.

In response to this the On Course Foundation was formed which offers injured men and women who are retired or still serving in the military, the opportunity to play golf and/or work within the industry not just today but for many years to come.

Due to the vast improvement in technology and rehab - no longer are a number of severely injured servicemen, ex-servicemen and

women bound to their wheelchairs. With this progression, On Course provides opportunities for a number of injured service and ex-service personnel to be part of or work in the golf industry.

The charity is receiving whole hearted support from Patron, HRH The Duke of York, combining as it does his passion for the Armed Services, in which he served during the Falklands' conflict, and his love for the game of golf.

"I am delighted that we have found a way for the golfing industry as a whole to support our Armed Forces in a very positive way," said The Duke .

Alex Harrison was in the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, but attached to the Royal Anglian Regiment, when he was posted to the notorious Helmand Province, in Afghanistan, in April, 2007.

He had been there exactly one month when he was shot.

Alex had been part of a group sent to clear compounds in which the Taliaban were building tunnels and trenches when his section was ambushed and he was struck by a machine gun round from close



range as he passed the door of a small room.

"A bullet hit me through the helmet at the side of my temple and bounced off the bottom of my eye socket, forcing my eye up into my brain giving me brain damage and my eye socket filled with blood," said Alex, as we sat in his Lincoln home three and a half years on.

Remarkably, it didn't knock him out and he was able to get back to his section, but not before being struck by a piece of shrapnel in his bottom and breathing in some poisonous gas which burnt his airways.

"I had three injuries, one of them nearfatal, but although I was unable to speak as the nerves in my face had been deadened, I was able to draw a picture on the sand to show how the rooms in the compound all linked together," said Alex, who was just 19 at the time, and who was mentioned in despatches for his bravery.

He eventually succumbed to his injuries and passed out, waking up in a Birmingham hospital where he then spent six days in intensive care, another six weeks on a normal



ABOVE: The group which went to Orlando with On Course Foundation patron, Arnold Palmer

ward, before going home on sick leave.

He also spent six weeks at Headley Court, the renowned Armed Forces rehabilitation centre, where he learned to cope with the loss of an eye and his brain damage – a condition of which you now see no obvious sign.

“I sometimes have difficulty linking sentences together, and with normal things like wiring up a plug, I have to sit there longer than I would have had to before and work it out. But I’ll get there,” he said.

After his rehabilitation he was assigned to the Army Stores but being an active outdoor type, he absolutely hated the posting and sought a medical discharge.

The On Course Foundation has made it possible for people like Alex and his colleagues, many of whom may have lost limbs but who are still more active and physically able than the majority of the population, to get back on track

The founder of On Course, John Simpson who in effect has only one good leg after contracting polio at a young age, has enjoyed a glorious career in the game managing

players such as Nick Faldo, Greg Norman and Vijay Singh John took a party of eight ex and currently serving military personnel (including Alex) to Orlando earlier in the year to experience the delights of playing golf in the sunshine.

The servicemen met up with the American Wounded Warriors and also had the privilege of meeting the Foundation’s other Patron, Arnold Palmer who said, “To see that our beloved game can be used as an integral tool in the rehabilitation of soldiers from around the world fills me with great pride.”

The America trip also allowed the servicemen to develop a love for golf, while at the same time continuing their rehabilitation with a game that requires concentration, balance and patience.

“It has helped with my depth perception having gone from two eyes to one. I’m starting to get used to it now and can work out how far the club head is off the ground. It was really hard to start with though,” explained Alex.

He is currently in discussion with a local course with the aim of securing a work experience placement

on the greenkeeping staff, a career that is really exciting to him.

“I’d love to work in full time greenkeeping. It would suit me down to the ground. I’m used to working outside and the early hours certainly wouldn’t worry me.”

Alex is not unusual...

There are many young men, similarly disciplined and eager, who would also make excellent greenkeepers and The Poppy Factory’s Employment Scheme* is supporting wounded On Course members by proving an assisted platform into work via initial funding. This support will help Alex develop a meaningful career in the golfing industry



The guys discovered a love for golf while in America

Recruitment Opportunities?

If anyone feels that they could offer employment to one of our brave ex-servicemen please register your interest by emailing info@oncoursefoundation.com or for more information visit the On Course Foundation Website www.oncoursefoundation.com

*The Royal British Legion Poppy Factory is a charity which exists to create employment opportunities for disabled ex-Servicemen and women