



BIG IDEAS

Remember Together: Nuclear Test Veterans *Impact Report*

Delivered by Big Ideas

Funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs as part of the Nuclear Test Veteran Community Fund

Remember Together: Nuclear Test Veterans was a national programme delivered by Big Ideas, funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs as part of the Nuclear Test Veteran Community Fund. It set out to raise public awareness of the men and women who served during Britain's nuclear testing programme in the 1950s and 60s — a chapter of British history that had, until recently, been largely overlooked and officially unacknowledged.

The programme engaged communities, schools and institutions across all four nations of the UK. Through youth-led intergenerational films, digital events for primary and secondary schools, in-person and online events for community groups supported by a small grants scheme and a national media campaign. Remember Together reached over 4,000 people, exceeded its engagement targets, and gave veterans a platform to share their experiences with the next generation - many for the very first time.



The Veterans



Four nuclear test veterans were selected to represent different parts of the UK, with an emphasis on inclusion and on the breadth of roles that the testing programme involved – not only senior officers, but the bakers, carpenters, road builders and data collectors who made it function.

- John Folkes (England) – involved in cloud sampling and data gathering
- Brian Davies (Wales) – a baker who served during the tests
- David Whyte (Scotland) – a road builder who collected debris
- Mr Naikawakawavesi (Northern Ireland / Fiji) – a carpenter who helped build army barracks

The inclusion of a Fijian veteran was made possible through the support of the British High Commissioner in Suva and acknowledged the international dimension of Britain's testing programme and the communities beyond the UK whose people served in it. This was a particularly significant decision, reflecting Big Ideas' commitment to telling the fullest possible version of a story.

All four veterans who participated in the programme, including Squadron Leader John Robinson, who took part in the schools events gave their full support to the project and remained in active contact with the Big Ideas team throughout, frequently sharing updates on their medals and the progress of recognition campaigns.

"I felt privileged. For the first time I feel that people are starting to believe what really went on, in a way that the government hasn't. Meeting that generation - wow - it has blown me away. To pass this on to them, it's like passing the baton, it's mind blowing. I am very indebted to the whole project."

John Folkes, Nuclear Test Veteran

"I can't tell you what it means to my father and indeed to us as a family that his story is now documented for future generations; this is all he wants. There were no dry eyes in the house after watching the film!"

Daughter of Brian Davies, Nuclear Test Veteran

The Films

At the heart of the programme were four short documentary films, one for each home nation, in which young people interviewed nuclear test veterans about their experiences. The films were co-produced with participants: veterans and young people alike were

given meaningful input into the process, and Big Ideas invested significant time in building the trusting relationships that made authentic storytelling possible.



Schools were selected through Big Ideas' established network of expert teachers, with sensitivity to the complex and unresolved issues facing the NTV community. Workshops prepared young people to engage thoughtfully with veterans, including, in one case, a veteran living with dementia. Safeguarding was prioritised throughout.

The films were produced in partnership with the Imperial War Museum, which shared archive footage, and with the British High Commission in Fiji. They were made freely available as a permanent educational resource for schools and community groups across the UK.

The four films can be viewed here:

big-ideas.org/remember-together-nuclear-test-veterans-films

"You will learn a good lesson. Let's hope the lessons will be learned. You should know what happened. I'm glad that you are interested."

Veterans speaking to young people during filming

Schools engagement

The films formed the foundation of a schools engagement programme that reached 3,402 young people from 65 schools across all four home nations, significantly exceeding the original target of 2,000.

On 3rd October, the anniversary of Operation Hurricane and the start of Britain's nuclear testing programme in 1952, Big Ideas delivered a digital schools day comprising two secondary events and one primary event. Pupils watched the films, took part in interactive challenges, and had the opportunity to put questions directly to Squadron Leader John Robinson, a former pilot who flew cloud-sampling missions during the tests and recipient of the Air Force Cross and Bar.

A sixth form in-person event at a London school engaged a further 300 students, who wrote messages for the veterans, some of which were shared publicly on social media. Primary schools joined a 45-minute live event, with pupils subsequently creating displays

for their schools to share during Remembrance season. All participating schools received bilingual digital resource packs, available in both English and Welsh.

79 teachers engaged with the programme, exceeding the target of 65.

"It's very impressive that they faced nuclear bombs and they want to take the time to teach younger people about their experiences. You are very brave, kind and respectful."

Pupil, Eagley Junior School, Bolton

"A big thank you from all of us at Haslam Park Primary School. We appreciate the sacrifices that you made and although it may have had negative consequences for you, it has saved many lives around the world. Thank you. You are appreciated."

Pupils, Haslam Park Primary, Bolton

Community engagement

Alongside the schools programme, Remember Together engaged 603 people across community settings, exceeding the target of 500. A small grants scheme offered up to £100 per group to support community-led events. In practice, Big Ideas found that community organisations were enthusiastic but lacked the confidence to run events independently, even with detailed resource packs. The team responded by pivoting to facilitated delivery, running in-person and online events directly with organisations that had relevant expertise or personal connections to the topic.

Community partners included:

- The Imperial War Museum War and Conflict Special Subject Network
- The National Army Museum
- The Nuclear Community Charitable Fund (conference presentation)
- Universities of Liverpool and South Wales
- Age UK Westminster, Age UK Islington and Waltham Forest Age UK Veterans Group
- The Abbey Centre, Westminster (Young at Heart and The Card Sharks groups)
- HMP Haverigg Veterans Group
- Newham Community Kitchen
- The Institute of Historical Research, University of London
- Bodmin Keep Museum, Cornwall
- The Air Cadets

One of the most striking findings from the community strand was the surprising personal connections uncovered by participants. At the Abbey Centre in Westminster, a group that

included people recovering from head injuries and those in the Young at Heart network revealed three strong individual connections to the events. Separately, Big Ideas discovered that two of its own funders and one team member had family connections to nuclear test veterans that they had been unaware of.

"The presentation was amazing and was well received by all in the group — we were amazed how many people in the group had an association with this topic."

Caroline Gandy-Brown, Project Manager, Young at Heart, The Abbey Centre

"I attended the recent event that you hosted with the Imperial War Museum. I am a third-year Radio Production student at the University of Salford and I am currently producing a podcast about the nuclear tests and Christmas Island. My Grandad was on the island and he never really spoke about his experiences so it is something I wanted to learn more about and help to educate people."

Archie, University of Salford student, following the IWM event

Media and Public reach

On 3 October 2023, BBC correspondent Tim Muffett visited St John's Catholic Comprehensive School with veteran John Folkes to film a five-minute report marking the 71st anniversary of Operation Hurricane. The report was broadcast on BBC One Breakfast reaching an average audience of 6.5 million people, giving the programme a mainstream public platform far beyond its direct engagement activities.

The broadcast had a direct knock-on impact: Big Ideas was subsequently contacted by the education officer at HMP Haverigg Prison, leading to an online event for 45 prisoners from the Veterans Group, which received outstanding feedback.

The programme also maintained a consistent social media presence throughout, with content amplified by the Office for Veterans' Affairs and other partners, reaching tens of thousands of additional people across platforms.

"The standard of the presentational material was first class, and the delivery was that of consummate professionals. Having worked with Prisoners and Veterans for many years, I can assure you that they were captivated and moved by what they saw and heard. From an educational aspect, there was exactly the right proportions of spoken word, reflection, video interaction and practical response."

Rev Fr Robert T Halshaw, Head of Chaplaincy and Veterans in Custody Manager, HMP Haverigg

Participant voice

Across all strands of the programme, participants were invited to write messages for the veterans. The responses demonstrated the depth of feeling this neglected history provoked when people encountered it for the first time.

"Thank you for making us aware of something we are only vaguely aware of. Very thought provoking."

Participant, Abbey Centre, Westminster

"It's important that we share this important but lesser-told story. Thank you to the veterans who have taken part in the project."

Participant, IWM War and Conflict Specialist Subject Network

"The films are very powerful. The stories of the nuclear test vets are very moving. It is good to see these stories being told and it is long past due for full recognition of their sacrifices."

WH Law, Age UK Islington

"Thank you so much to the veterans who shared their stories today — hearing your stories has absolutely strengthened my resolve to play whatever part I can in calling for nuclear disarmament and peace."

Participant, IWM network event

Conclusions and legacy

Remember Together: Nuclear Test Veterans demonstrated that there is substantial public appetite for this history, and that the barriers to engagement are primarily those of awareness and confidence, not interest. When people encountered the veterans' stories, the response was consistently one of surprise, gratitude and a desire to know more. The programme exceeded all of its primary targets: 3,402 young people engaged against a target of 2,000; 603 community participants against a target of 500; 79 teachers engaged against a target of 65; and all four films delivered on time and to a high standard.

The four films represent a lasting legacy of the programme. They are a permanent, freely accessible educational resource, produced with the full participation of the veterans themselves, documenting experiences that would otherwise be at risk of being lost. They

have been used across schools, universities, community centres, prisons and national institutions and they continue to be available to any organisation that wishes to use them.

Big Ideas recommends that this work continues. The public appetite is clear, the infrastructure is in place, and the aging veterans remain willing to share their stories while they can.