

# BIG BACKS 'BATTLEFIELD-READY' WWII VETERANS WITH MORE FUNDING

The Big Lottery Fund is committing over £1 million in extra good cause funding in the year ahead for the country's WWII veterans to make sure they can make their personal battlefield commemorative journeys to the places they saw action.

The additional funding for the scheme comes on the day the Fund is naming the 50,000<sup>th</sup> individual to benefit from the Heroes Return grant schemes.

The Big Lottery Fund's UK Interim Chair, **Anna Southall**, is presenting the 50,000<sup>th</sup> award to a veteran at the Imperial War Museum in London. The recipient is an RAF Bomber Command veteran **Gordon Mellor** who escaped occupied France with the help of the Resistance via the Comet Line. To date 50,000 veterans, widows, spouse and carers have taken up the opportunity presented by the scheme to make their individual pilgrimages.

The extra funding for the scheme will help ensure veterans still to apply are able to journey in the year ahead to revisit the scenes of WWII events, such as the forthcoming 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Crete.

**Anna Southall** said: "This extension of the scheme will be a big help to those who have felt so far unable to make their personal journeys back to the battlefronts of WWII.

"The popularity of Heroes Return is reflected in the many emotional letters we have received from veterans and their families. It is clear how valuable these journeys are in helping veterans come to terms with traumatic events and experiences and to remember those lost almost 70 years ago."

Today the BIG Lottery Fund's Interim Chair will meet the 50,000th Heroes Return beneficiary **91-year-old Gordon Mellor** at the Imperial War Museum. To date £24.3 million has been awarded for the WWII scheme by the Fund since 2004.

The event is being attended by a number of veterans including Londoner **Gordon Mellor** who has used his funding to go back to France where a memorial was held for the escapees who died crossing the Pyrenees and for the people who were killed for helping them. He managed to escape occupied France with the help of the Resistance after being shot down.

**Gordon Mellor** vividly recalls: "Returning from a short night raid over Aachen we were chased by a Messerschmitt 109. He cracked us four times on each set of engines and we started to hurtle down at a fast rate. I managed to bail out and crashed into a tree. The Flight engineer came out behind me but his parachute failed and he hit a roof on the side of a house and was killed. I saw the plane burning in a field inside were the pilot and rear gunner who hadn't managed to get out. I was about

2km from the crash and managed to get out of the tree, stuffing my parachute between the branches. As I stood in the darkness looking at the flames I had the loneliest feeling of all my life, a desperate feeling of being completely alone. I decided I had to get away as quick as I could so started heading South West across the blackness toward Spain.”

**The current Heroes Return2 programme, was scheduled to close in January but now remains open until 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012.**

Through the scheme, Second World War veterans from the UK, Channel Islands and Republic of Ireland can apply for travel and accommodation costs to visit the places across the world where they saw active service or to take part in an official commemoration in the UK. War widows and widowers of veterans are also eligible, and carers and spouses can also receive funding to travel with veterans.

More information and details of how to apply for a Heroes Return 2 grant are available by calling **0845 00 00 121** or visiting [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn)

### **Forces in Mind**

BIG is continuing its support for UK veterans through its new £35 million **Forces in Mind** initiative to establish an independent Trust to provide long term support and advocacy for former service personnel. The funding will help veterans who served in conflicts including Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf War struggling with the transition to civilian life, especially those whose psychological well-being subsequently impacts on the quality of their life and others around them.

Launched to mark the historic 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in 2004, BIG's first Heroes Return scheme awarded £16.6 million to over 39,000 veterans, spouses, widows and carers to fund commemorative visits to Second World War battlefields, cemeteries and other significant places across the world.

Heroes Return was the centre-piece of the Veterans Reunited programme including Home Front Recall which awarded £19.2 million to support UK-based group events and activities to commemorate those who contributed to the war-effort on the home front, and Their Past Your Future with an ongoing £9.6 million scheme funding a UK-wide schools and education programme to give young people the opportunity to learn first-hand from veterans about their experience of war.